॥ साधन पञ्चकं ॥

SADHANA PANCHAKAM

The Rationale of Sadhana

"THE SANDEEPANY EXPERIENCE"

Reflections by

SWAMI GURUBHAKTANANDA

TEXT 01

Sandeepany's Vedanta Course

List of All the Course Texts in Chronological Sequence:

Text No.	TITLE OF TEXT	Text No.	TITLE OF TEXT
1	***Sadhana Panchakam***	24	*Hanuman Chalisa*
2	*Tattwa Bodha*	25	*Vakya Vritti*
3	*Atma Bodha*	26	*Advaita Makaranda*
4	*Bhaja Govindam*	27	*Kaivalya Upanishad*
5	*Manisha Panchakam*	28	*Bhagavad Geeta (Discourse --)*
6	*Forgive Me*	29	*Mundaka Upanishad*
7	*Upadesha Sara*	30	*Amritabindu Upanishad*
8	*Prashna Upanishad*	31	*Mukunda Mala (Bhakti Text)*
9	*Dhanyashtakam*	32	*Tapovan Shatkam*
10	*Bodha Sara*	33	*The Mahavakyas, Panchadasi 5*
11	*Viveka Choodamani*	34	*Aitareya Upanishad*
12	*Jnana Sara*	35	*Narada Bhakti Sutras*
13	*Drig-Drishya Viveka*	36	*Taittiriya Upanishad*
14	*"Tat Twam Asi" – Chand Up 6*	37	*Jivan Sutrani (Tips for Happy Living)*
15	*Dhyana Swaroopam*	38	*Kena Upanishad*
16	*"Bhoomaiva Sukham" Chand Up 7*	39	*Aparoksha Anubhuti (Meditation)*
17	*Manah Shodhanam*	40	*108 Names of Pujya Gurudev*
18	*"Nataka Deepa" – Panchadasi 10*	41	*Mandukya Upanishad*
19	*Isavasya Upanishad*	42	*Dakshinamurty Ashtakam*
20	*Katha Upanishad*	43	*Shad Darshanaah*
21	*"Sara Sangrah" – Yoga Vasishtha*	44	*Brahma Sootras*
22	*Vedanta Sara*	45	*Jivanmuktananda Lahari*
23	*Mahabharata + Geeta Dhyanam*	46	*Chinmaya Pledge*

A NOTE ABOUT SANDEEPANY

Sandeepany Sadhanalaya is an institution run by the Chinmaya Mission in Powai, Mumbai, teaching a 2-year Vedanta Course. It has a very balanced daily programme of basic Samskrit, Vedic chanting, Vedanta study, Bhagavatam, Ramacharitmanas, Bhajans, meditation, sports and fitness exercises, team-building outings, games and drama, celebration of all Hindu festivals, weekly Gayatri Havan and Guru Paduka Pooja, and Karma Yoga activities.

This series is an effort to promote the learning of Vedanta; it does not replace Course, but hopes to inspire young people to spend two years of their life for an experience that is sure to make a far-reaching spiritual impact on their personal lives. Sandeepany is an all-round spiritual course that gives proper direction to the youth and to those approaching retirement. Hinduism is in dire need of a band of systematically trained teachers or Acharyas who can serve this Eternal Religion.

– The Editor, 9th July 2017, the Holy Guru Purnima Day

Om Namah Shivaaya!

Text
01







॥ साधन पञ्चकं ॥

SADHANA PANCHAKAM

"The Rationale of Sadhana"

Composed by

Sri Adi Shankaracharyaji

24 Talks

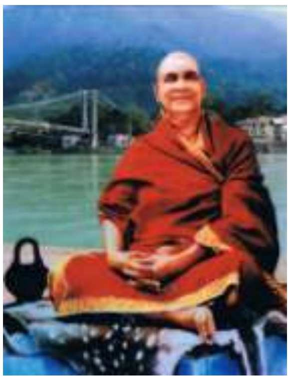
by SWAMI GURUBHAKTANANDA

at Sivanandashram, Rishikesh from 2nd December 2016 to 28th June 2017

*Based on the 25 Lectures delivered by **Swami Advayananda**,*
Acharyaji, 15th Batch Vedanta Course,
At Sandeepany Sadhanalaya, Powai, Mumbai
September 2nd – September 29th, 2011



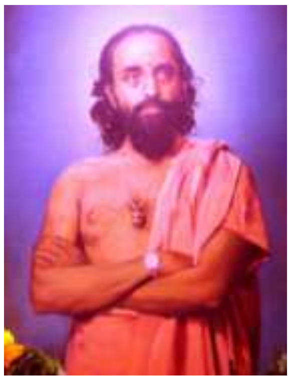
Adi Shankaracharya



Swami Sivananda



Swami Tapovanji



Swami Chinmayananda

SERVE • LOVE • GIVE • PURIFY • MEDITATE • REALISE

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Declaration by the Author: *The material in this series is under inspiration of the Sandeepany Vedanta Course, but largely consists of the Author's reflections on the Course. He is deeply indebted to the Chinmaya Mission for its excellent presentation of the Course by their renowned and dedicated Acharyas.*

He is also indebted to Divine Life Society Sivanandashram for the opportunity availed to him to deliver the talks at the Samadhi Mandir night Satsangs; and for giving him unfettered freedom of creativity as required.

Personal Dedication

1. To my Parents, Smt Sharadaben & Sri Ratilalbhai Kapitan
who inspired me to study in life, to stick to the path of Dharma and pursue the highest ideals; and swamped me with their abundant Love;

2. To Pujya Sri Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj
the President of the Divine Life Society of Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India, who constantly encouraged and supported this effort;

3. To Pujya Sri Swami Tejomayanandaji (Guruji)
for his boundless vision and inspiration to create a vibrant organisation;

4. To Sri Swami Advayanandaji and Sri Swami Sharadanandaji
my Acharyaji and Upa-Acharyaji at Sandeepany, who imparted their bountiful knowledge and wisdom with rare selfless Divine Love, just as the Rishis of yore would wish to see them do.

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THE RATIONALE OF SADHANA

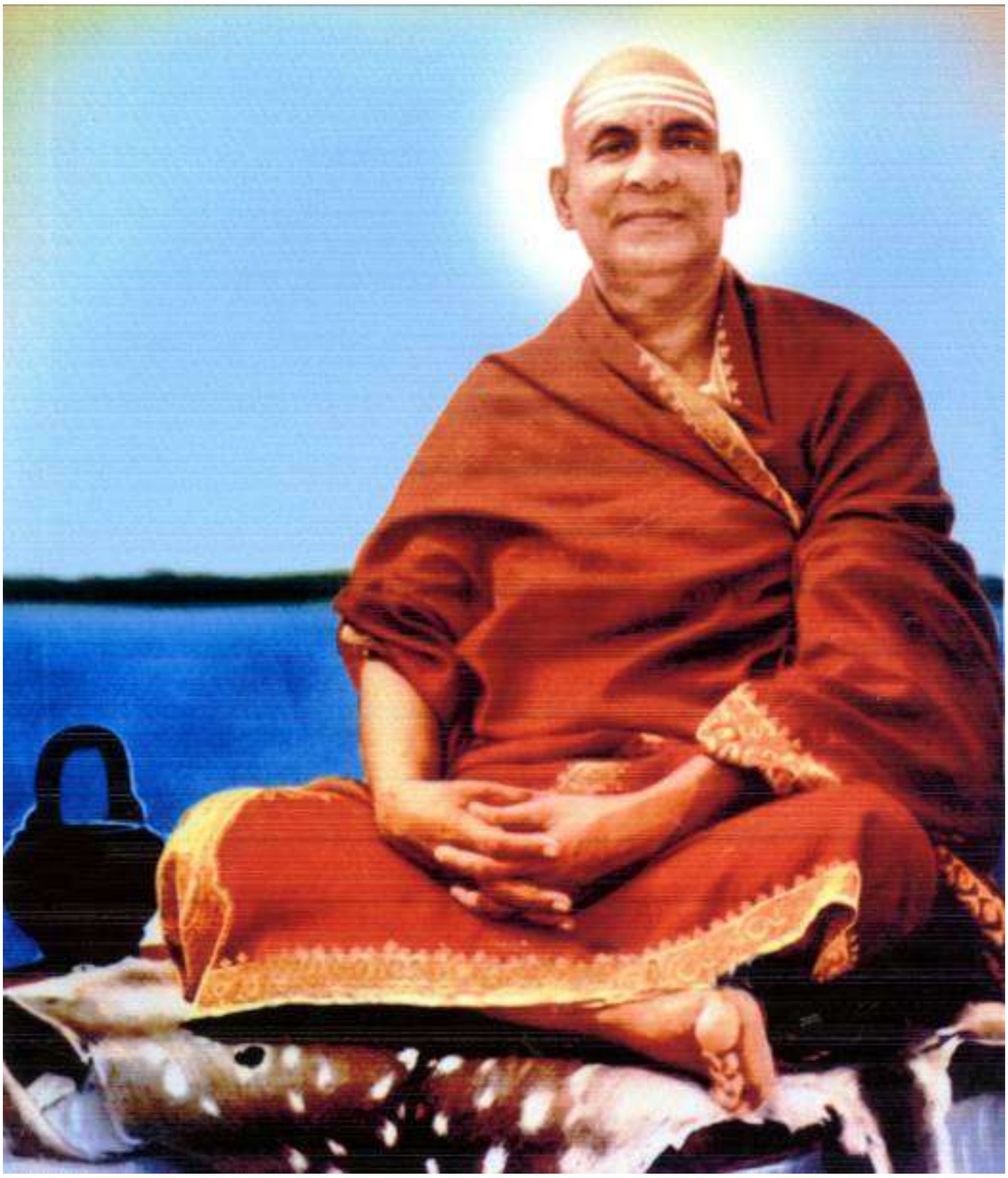
Based on SADHANA PANCHAKAM

"Forty Steps to Spiritual Living"

STRUCTURE OF TALKS

TALK	DATE	STEP	T I T L E	PAGES
	Sadhana in the Four Ashramas:		***Verses 1-3***	
1	02nd December	1-40	*Introduction to the **Whole Series***	05-08
2	09th December	1-4	*Overview of **Brahmacharya Ashrama***	11-14
3	16th December	1	*Brahmacharya Ashrama – 1*	15-18
4	04th January	2	*Brahmacharya Ashrama – 2*	19-22
5	11th January	3	*Brahmacharya Ashrama – 3*	23-26
6	18th January	4	*Brahmacharya Ashrama – 4*	27-30
7	25th January	5-8	*Overview of **Grihastha Ashrama***	33-36
8	01st February	5-6	*Grihastha Ashrama – 1*	37-40
9	08th February	7-8	*Grihastha Ashrama – 2*	41-44
10	15th February	9-12	*Overview of **Vanaprastha Ashrama***	47-50
11	22nd February	9-10	*Vanaprastha Ashrama – 1*	51-54
12	01st March	11-12	*Vanaprastha Ashrama – 2*	55-58
13	22nd March	13-24	*Overview of **Sannyasa Ashrama***	61-64
14	29th March	13-14	*Sannyas Ashrama – 1: **Guru Upasadana***	65-68
15	12th April	15-16	*Sannyas Ashrama – 2: **Sravana***	69-72
16	19th April	17-18	*Sannyas Ashrama – 3: **Manana***	73-76
17	26th April	19-20	*Sannyas Ashrama – 4: Manana (Contd)*	77-80
18	03rd May	21-22	*Sannyas Ashrama – 5: **Nididhyasana***	81-84
19	10th May	23-24	*Sannyas Ashrama – 6: Nididhyasana (Cont)*	85-88
	Sadhana for All Stages:		***Verse 4***	
20	24th May	25-28	*Practice of Austerity – **Tapas***	89-92
21	31st May	29-32	*Practice of Endurance – **Titiksha***	93-96
	Sadhana for the Highest Flight:		***Verse 5***	
22	14th June	33-34	*Savikalpa Samadhi – **Penultimate Steps***	97-100
23	21st June	35-36	*Nirvikalpa Samadhi – **Merging With God***	101-104
24	28th June	37-40	*Jivanmukti – **Liberation from Life Cycle***	105-108

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SRI SWAMI SIVANANDA

1887 to 1963

Founder President of

DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY,
SIVANANDASHRAM, RISHIKESH, INDIA

A Modern-Day Sannyasin Par-Excellance

॥ साधन पञ्चकं ॥

SADHANA PANCHAKAM

“The Rationale of Sadhana”

FOR SAMSKRIT TEXT WITH SANDHEES

Guide to Splitting Sandhees

Conventional Samskrit Format is used in the body of the book.

Split-Sandhee Samskrit Format is given at the end of the book, for the benefit of *beginners*. Word-combinations (Sandhees) are highlighted in bold underline (as shown in the table below) to help indicate the splitting of words. This is an original feature.

Purpose: To assist new students who are just finding their way in Samskrit to break up the words (Pada Chheda). It is *not* intended for those already proficient in Samskrit.

How it Works: 1. Enables *normal chanting*. The bold underlined letters are Sandhees, not words, and are needed only to join words for correct chanting.

2. Indicates *splitting of words*. To determine the words on either side of the Sandhee, the following table may be used. [The table has been applied in the transliteration within the body of the book, where individual words are used.]

Add to End of Prior Word	SANDHEE	Add to Front of Posterior Word
अ (a)	–**आ**– (aa)	अ (a)
इ (i)	–**ई**– (ee)	इ (i)
उ (u)	–**ऊ**– (oo)	उ (u)
elongated vowel	–"x–	short vowel
short vowel	–x"–	elongated vowel
elongated vowel	–"x" –	elongated vowel
अ (a)	–**ए**– (e)	इ (i)
अ (a)	–**ऐ**– (ai)	ए (e)
अ (a)	–**ओ**– (o)	उ (u)
अ (a)	–**औ**– (au)	ऐ (ai)
अः (ah)	–**ओ** (o)	unaffected
इ (i)	–**य्** (y)	unaffected
उ (u)	–**व्** (v)	unaffected
: (h)	–**स्**, –**र्**, –**श्**	unaffected

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THE RATIONALE OF SADHANA

Based on SADHANA PANCHAKAM

"Forty Steps to Spiritual Living"

CONTENTS

(incorporates the English Translation of Sadhana Panchakam)

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॥ साधन पञ्चकं ॥

SADHANA PANCHAKAM

"The Rationale of Sadhana"

वेदो नित्यमधीयतां तदुदितं कर्म स्वनुष्ठीयतां
तेनेशस्य विधीयतामपचितिः काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ।
पापौघः परिधूयतां भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयता-
मात्मेच्छा व्यवसीयतां निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥ १॥ Steps 1-8

सङ्गः सत्सु विधीयतां भगवतो भक्तिर्दृढाऽऽधीयतां
शान्त्यादिः परिचीयतां दृढतरं कर्माशु सन्त्यज्यताम् ।
सद्विद्वानुपसृप्यतां प्रतिदिनं तत्पादुका सेव्यतां
ब्रह्मैकाक्षरमर्थ्यतां श्रुतिशिरोवाक्यं समाकर्ण्यताम् ॥ २॥ Steps 9-16

वाक्यार्थश्च विचार्यतां श्रुतिशिरःपक्षः समाश्रीयतां
दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां श्रुतिमतस्तर्कोऽनुसन्धीयताम् ।
ब्रह्मास्मीति विभाव्यतामहरहर्गर्वः परित्यज्यतां
देहेऽहम्मतिरुज्झ्यतां बुधजनैर्वादः परित्यज्यताम् ॥ ३॥ Steps 17-24

क्षुद्व्याधिश्च चिकित्स्यतां प्रतिदिनं भिक्षौषधं भुज्यतां
स्वाद्वन्नं न तु याच्यतां विधिवशात् प्राप्तेन सन्तुष्यताम् ।
शीतोष्णादि विषह्यतां न तु वृथा वाक्यं समुच्चार्यता-
मौदासीन्यमभीप्स्यतां जनकृपानैष्ठुर्यमुत्सृज्यताम् ॥ ४ ॥ Steps 25-32

एकान्ते सुखमास्यतां परतरे चेतः समाधीयतां
पूर्णात्मा सुसमीक्ष्यतां जगदिदं तद्बाधितं दृश्यताम् ।
प्राक्कर्म प्रविलाप्यतां चितिबलान्नाप्युत्तरैः श्लिष्यतां
प्रारब्धं त्विह भुज्यतामथ परब्रह्मात्मना स्थीयताम् ॥ ५॥ Steps 33-40

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SADHANA PANCHAKAM

"The Rationale of Sadhana"

English Transliteration

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vēdō nityamadhīyatāṁ taduditaṁ karma svanuṣṭhīyatāṁ
tēnēśasya vidhīyatāmapacitiḥ kāmyē matistyajyatām |
pāpaughaḥ paridhūyatāṁ bhavasukhē dōṣō:'nusandhīyatā-
mātmēcchā vyavasīyatāṁ nijagr̥hāttūrṇaṁ vinirgamyatām || 1|| Steps 1-8

saṅgaḥ satsu vidhīyatāṁ bhagavatō bhaktirdr̥ḍhā:':'dhīyatāṁ
śāntyādiḥ paricīyatāṁ dr̥ḍhataraṁ karmāśu santyajyatām |
sadvidvānupasr̥pyatāṁ pratidinaṁ tatpādukā sēvyatāṁ
brahmaikākṣaramarthyatāṁ śrutiśirōvākyaṁ samākarṇyatām || 2|| Steps 9-16

vākyārthaśca vicāryatāṁ śrutiśiraḥpakṣaḥ samāśrīyatāṁ
dustarkātsuviramyatāṁ śrutimatastarkō:'nusandhīyatām |
brahmāsmīti vibhāvyatāmaharahargarvaḥ parityajyatāṁ
dēhē:'hammatirujjhyatāṁ budhajanairvādaḥ parityajyatām || 3|| Steps 17-24

kṣudvyādhiśca cikitsyatāṁ pratidinaṁ bhikṣauṣadhaṁ bhujyatāṁ
svādvannaṁ na tu yācyatāṁ vidhivaśāt prāptēna santuṣyatām |
śītōṣṇādi viṣahyatāṁ na tu vr̥thā vākyaṁ samuccāryatā-
maudāsīnyamabhīpsyatāṁ janakr̥pānaiṣṭhuryamutsr̥jyatām || 4 || Steps 25-32

ēkāntē sukhamāsyatāṁ paratarē cētaḥ samādhīyatāṁ
pūrṇātmā susamīkṣyatāṁ jagadidaṁ tadbādhitaṁ dr̥śyatām |
prākkarma pravilāpyatāṁ citibalānnāpyuttaraiḥ śliṣyatāṁ
prārabdhaṁ tviha bhujyatāmatha parabrahmātmanā sthīyatām || 5|| Steps 33-40

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SADHANA PANCHAKAM

THE RATIONALE OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION TO THE WHOLE SERIES

THIS TEXT WAS WRITTEN by Sri Adi Shankaracharya towards the end of his brief 32-year lifespan. A request was made by his disciples that he should write a brief text summarizing his approach to spiritual life. Bringing all his experience to bear, the great Bhashyakara wrote the poem which forms the basis of these talks**.**

Sadhana Panchakam derives its name from the five verses that comprise the poem, each one dealing with spiritual practices. Each verse contains 8 instructions, making a total of 40 instructions. In spite of their brevity, they are remarkable for their deep insight to reveal the very essence of Sadhana at every stage of one's spiritual growth.

The instructions are considered to be very *precious and priceless*, and contain the principles of the practice of Sadhana. For this reason the text also goes by a second name, ***Upadesha Pancharatnam***, meaning "*Five precious gems of advice or teaching*".

Further, the instructions are not in a haphazard order, but presented in a *logical sequence*, in the order in which they have to be practised. They are like the stations we pass during a railway journey, each station taking us closer and closer to our destination. This sequential format of the text gives it its third name, ***Sopana Arohana Nyaya,*** which means "*A Logical Climbing Ladder in Sadhana*".

The first 24 steps (Verses 1-3) take us sequentially through the *Four Stages of Life*. The four stages are the natural structure of each person's life. It is not an *Indian* concept. It is universally applicable, and is seen in human societies all over the world. Indian society has simply formalised the pattern into the above four stages, without forcing the issue by putting ages to each stage:

1. ***Brahmacharya Stage***:	*The Life of Studentship*	Steps 1 to 4
2. ***Grihastha Stage***:	*The Householder's Life*	Steps 5 to 8;
3. ***Vanaprastha Stage***:	*The Life of Retirement*	Steps 9 to 12;
4. ***Sannyasa Stage***:	*The Life of Renunciation*	Steps 13 to 24.

This is followed by the next 16 steps (Verses 4-5) in which four distinct topics are taken up to take us to the highest Goal of Self-Realisation:

5. ***Practice of Tapas***	*Voluntary Austerity*	Steps 25 to 28;
6. ***Practice of Titiksha***	*Enduring Life's Pin-pricks*	Steps 29 to 32;
7. ***To Nirvikalpa Samadhi***	*Final Steps to Realisation*	Steps 33 to 36;
8. ***Jivanmukti***	*Freedom from All Bondage*	Steps 37 to 40.

*****

An Interesting Allegory:

There was once a community of lions living in a zoo. They had settled down comfortably with their life in the zoo. They had adjusted to the fact that they could not roam about freely in the forest or have the pleasure of killing their own prey.

One day a young, bright-looking lion joined them. He became disgusted with the life in the zoo. He explained these feelings to his comrades there. They urged him to forget his former free life and just get used to the new one. There was no point in complaining about the situation in the zoo. After all, they were getting *free* food!

The young lion, however, was determined only to free himself from the zoo. His eyes gazed only at the fence, and his mind on how to get to the other side. Nothing interested him in the zoo. His comrades thought he was crazy, but he told them, "This is not life; it is imprisonment. However comfortable you may be in here, remember you are only a prisoner. Escape from here! Escape! Escape I must, and escape I SHALL!"

We are like the lions trapped in the zoo of worldly existence. Like the young lion, we should only be concerned with how to escape. We must not have any other thing on our mind. Don't get too comfortable here. Just get out of captivity!

The following Series of talks are intended for those young, daring lions in today's world who have the same mind set as the lion in the above allegory. For such lions, this Series unfolds the Sadhana or practical steps which are needed to get out of the prison of a narrow individualistic existence full of worldly urges, and discover within themselves the supreme spiritual purpose of human life as advised to us by the great saints of the world.

THE FOUR PURUSHARTHAS

Hinduism speaks of the four universal Purusharthas or valid aims of human existence applicable to all people in all ages and in all parts of the world. They are:

1. **DHARMA**: "*The Life of Righteous Conduct*";
2. **ARTHA**: "*The Accumulation of Wealth*";
3. **KAAMA**: "*The Fulfillment of Desire*";
4. **MOKSHA**: "*Liberation from Limited Existence*" or "*Attainment of Immortality*".

From 1 to 4, the order in which these Purusharthas are given is significant.

Prior to Accepting the Purusharthas

Without Dharma, we live in *Adharma*, i.e. the life of unrighteousness, which does not obey any code of morality, and is lived in total ignorance of the laws governing our existence in this world. In some previous birth, we all began our human existence in this stage of Adharma. We lived by the rule that "Might is Right". The Law of the jungle was obeyed.

At that time, our life had no meaningful aim and purpose – it did not need one. We simply lived as animals do, by instinct, and having **survival** as our only concern. There was no question of having any sense control, any selection on our desires, any restraint on our sense enjoyments. The pursuit of enjoyment completely engulfed us. If it became necessary

to plunder and loot others to satisfy our desires, we would not hesitate to do that. Such was the condition of our life in the earliest stage of our existence as human beings.

In such a stage, there was no need for any Sadhana or spiritual practice, for life was devoid of any spirituality. Our existence was purely at a materialistic level, pursuing sensual satisfaction and survival for its own sake.

There is still a vast sector of mankind which lives by this "Rule". In this stage, desire is at the 100% mark. If it could be possible to increase it even more, this would be welcome!

Stage 1: DHARMA Enters our Life

The first Purushartha is very significant. It marks the point in life when we decide that we need to have some sane order in life. Man is not a creature who is made to plunder and loot to survive. We should "Live and let live". This is the first law of Dharma.

When all our activities are governed by this principle, we have entered the orderly scheme of life. The Purusharthas now become relevant to us. Our first concern becomes knowledge of what is good and what is bad in life. This ushers in the first Purushartha, namely, *Dharma*. An enormous change begins to come about in our whole approach to life.

We usher in the need for Religion in our life. Religion finds its foothold in life. Until this point, whatever Religion we claimed to belong to was only in name. It meant nothing to us in practice. Now we begin to take an earnest interest in what is approved by "God", and what is not. This is the first Purushartha being sown into our life.

Desire starts dropping as we enter this stage, from 100% down to, let us say, 90%.

Stage 2: ARTHA – the Legitimate Accumulation of Wealth

The second Purushartha now begins to shape our lives. We realise that wealth needs to be gained in an orderly manner, without depriving others of it. A civilised society arises which is based on obtaining wealth by fair means. The idea of collective welfare is born into our mind.

This is a major step in our spiritual evolution. Wealth is seen with the respect that it deserves. It is not an "unlimited" resource to satisfy our *greed*, but something that should be gathered only in sufficient amount to satisfy our *need*.

We do not make any inordinate demand on Mother Nature to supply unlimited resources to us. We do not rape the Earth of its bounties, its wealth of minerals and metals, its supply of coal and oil fuel. We do not pollute our rivers, nor our precious atmosphere, nor litter the Earth with all sorts of toxic wastes.

With Artha, comes a sense of responsibility to take care of this Planet and use it well for our welfare, and not plunder it by extracting every drop of "the gifts of Nature". A ceiling is placed on how much wealth we need to obtain. Our desire range also reduces a little further, from 90% to say 80%. By now you must be catching the idea!

Stage 3: KAAMA – the Legitimate Fulfillment of Desire

The third Purushartha marks another milestone in our spiritual evolution. In addition to keeping a check on the amount of wealth we accumulate, this stage also sees some selectivity on the relationships that we develop. The family is, of course, the centre of our relationship circle, and desires are built up around our relationships. The circle is made wider and wider. The Divine, God or the Lord is included among our desires. The idea is set in the mind that our relationship with God is very special.

Our link with God is the one relationship which can set us free from inordinate desires and cravings in the world. This becomes the focus in our lives at this third stage. The centre of attraction shifts from the worldly circle towards a divine circle centred on God.

Kaama gets transformed from desire and passion for sensual satisfaction to aspiration for higher, spiritually more fulfilling sentiments. Devotion enters our life and we spend more time in worship, developing our relationship with God, the Indweller of our heart. Desires reduce even further, from 80% to say around 70%.

Stage 4: MOKSHA – Liberation from Worldly Entanglements

Finally we come to the fourth Purushartha. All the previous three continued with engagement in the world to a large degree, limited only by the Laws of Dharma; then the Laws of Acquisition; and then the Laws governing Merit (and Demerit).

There comes a time when man realises that all such engagements are endless, even if they are legitimate and largely under control of our higher nature. The urge is felt to break out of the endless round of births and deaths. Accumulation of wealth and merit is now seen in a different light. One wishes only for spiritual attainment, not attainment of anything of a worldly nature. The first traces of *Renunciation* are felt entering our life.

Renunciation begins with renouncing the **fruits of our actions**. When this happens, the entire nature of our life changes. We enter a new realm of pursuit. It is at this point that the Bhagavad Geeta begins. Lord Krishna was waiting for Arjuna to come to this level in his understanding. As soon as Arjuna showed signs of renunciation, marked by his surrender to Lord Krishna, the Lord enrolled him as an eligible seeker of Truth. Arjuna became Krishna's disciple, and true spiritual life began in earnest.

Stage 4 actually marks the serious entry into spiritual life. By this time desires have dropped even further, from 70% to 60%, as it were. It is at this point that Sadhana takes on more and more of our time. The first twelve steps see the gradual preparation for this stage of our growth.

Renunciation – in all its numerous aspects – is the entrance fee one pays to start spiritual life in earnest. *Sadhana Panchakam* reflects the importance of Renunciation by incorporating some practice of it even in the Brahmacharya stage of life, in Step 4. In Step 12, in the Vanaprastha stage of life, we see a much more elevated version of Renunciation, which enables us to move rapidly ahead on the spiritual path.

At this entry stage, the desires may be said to be at 60%. The rest of spiritual Sadhana brings it down to 0%, at which point one attains the highest state of illumination. This whole range of progress from 100% desire to 0% desire is the spectrum of Sadhana.

As we move from 100% towards 0%, the nature of Sadhana changes. That is the essential feature of "***The Rationale of Sadhana***".

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MILESTONES IN SADHANA

(from the Bhagavad Geeta)

DESIRE SCALE (a rough idea)	MAJOR DIVISIONS	PHASES & MILESTONES	SADHANA PANCHAKAM REF. & STEPS
0%		**PHASE V** **JIVANMUKTI** **Illumination**	**Steps 33-40** **NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI** **Full Abidance in Self**
		5. Sthitaprajna: ***Attain Steady Wisdom*** *– Zero Vasanas*	
10		**PHASE IV** **DHYANA YOGA** **Meditation**	**Steps 21-24** **NIDIDHYASANA** **Intermittant Abidance in Self**
		4. Yoga-Roodhah: ***Complete Mounting**** *– Quietude, Zero doubts*	
20	**JNANA KANDA**	**PHASE III** **JNANA YOGA** **Firm Knowledge**	**Steps 17-20** **MANANA** **Reflect & Enquire**
		3. Yoga-Yuktah: ***Attain Equipoise*** *– Reduce External Activities*	
40		**PHASE II** **BHAKTI YOGA** **Dispassion**	**Step 15-16** **SRAVANA** **Receive Knowledge of Self**
		2. Aarurukshah: ***Start Mounting**** *– Begin Om Japa*	
		PHASE I **KARMA YOGA** **Burn Out Karmas**	**Steps 13-14** **GURU UPASADANA** **Approach & Serve Guru**
60	**Jnana Kandi**	**1. Saadhaka:** ***Renounce fruits of Actions*** *– Reduce Karmas*	
	UPASANA KANDA	**SIXFOLD VIRTUES** **Devotion & Japa**	**VANAPRASTHA 9-12** **GRIHASTHA 5-8**
80	**Upaasaka**	**Grihasthi & Vanaprasthi:** *Increase Chitta Shuddhi, Chitta Ekagrata*	
	KARMA KANDA	**Start Reducing Desire** **Perfection in Work** **Secular Studies**	**Steps 1-4** **BRAHMACHARYA**
100	**Karma Kandi**	**Brahmachari in Gurukula:** *Follow Dharma (Righteous Conduct)*	



SRI PAWANA PUTRA HANUMAN

THE IDEAL BRAHMACHARI,

The Perfect Student and the Skillful Servant of Lord Rama & Sita

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA : Steps 1-4

AN OVERVIEW OF BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA

AS WE SAID EARLIER, the 40 Steps of Sadhana given in *Sadhana Panchakam* are a rational, step-by-step development in Sadhana, taking us from scratch right up to the realisation of God, across the full spectrum of spiritual life. These 40 Steps synchronise very well with the four stages of life as laid out in the Hindu scriptures. The four stages are Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sannyasa.

We begin today with an overview of the first stage. The first four steps concern the Brahmacharya Ashrama or stage of life. The steps are:

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA (Studentship):

- Step 1: ***Study the Vedas daily.*** ***Jnana Yoga***
- Step 2: ***Perform diligently the duties ordained by them.*** ***Karma Yoga***
- Step 3: ***Dedicate all those actions as worship unto the Lord.*** ***Bhakti Yoga***
- Step 4: ***Renounce all desires in the mind.*** ***Dhyana Yoga***

The above four steps cover the essence of what we are supposed to learn during the Brahmacharya Ashrama or the period of Studentship. From the age of 5 up to about 20 years, are the formative years of our life. We must use them to lay down a solid foundation upon which the rest of our life, the *superstructure of life*, is going to be built up.

Choosing the Right Superstructure

A society's view of life or its outlook determines the type of Education it provides for its younger generation. A view of life can be materialistic or spiritual, but most often it is a combination of both. In the West the former predominates, while in the East the latter is given greater priority. In India, the traditional view is that the spiritual unfoldment of man must take priority over his material needs. We are not going to debate this issue. *In actual life, both the material and spiritual are necessary*.

Sri Adi Shankaracharyaji, in *Sadhana Panchakam*, follows the ideal Indian outlook on life. He is interested primarily in the spiritual growth of society. The very word ***Sadhana*** is defined as that which takes us Godward. Sri Vinoba Bhave used to say, "Even a worm that is crawling towards God is worthy of our veneration, for it is doing Sadhana!"

So, we are going to choose the most worthwhile Superstructure of all – the goal most worth striving for – and that is the realisation of God. For such a specific super-structure, let us now design the most appropriate foundation.

Designing the Foundation: A Sound Educational System

The first four steps of *Sadhana Panchakam* are Sri Shankaracharyaji's proposed design for a sound educational system that will cater for the need of all mankind. In them he lays down the four basic requirements for the perfect design of such a foundation. His proposal also finds agreement among the finest minds in India. I must tell you here that the system in no way neglects man's secular needs. How did he design this firm foundation?

A foundation is always designed for what it has to support. As a Civil Engineer the writer used to be involved in foundation designs. To build a foundation, he had to first find out what load it had to carry. The design of a foundation starts by knowing the final use of the entire structure. In the case we are considering, the question is What educational foundation best supports the spiritual quest of man?

To understand the rationale of these steps, we have to work our way from the ultimate vision backwards, i.e. from the Goal of life to Step 4, then to Step 3, Step 2 and down to Step 1. We are actually going to do that design now, so that we can appreciate the far-sightedness and wisdom of the Rishis who had set up such a system.

THE RATIONALE OF THE DESIGN

Freedom from Desire*:* The experience of the saints and sages of India is that this spiritual goal requires us to have a calm and a pure mind which can spend long hours in *deep meditation*. Such a mind is possible only if we live in a way that we do not get soiled by the world. To remain above all taint, a life of non-attachment and freedom from desire is the fundamental requirement. For a God-centred life it is absolutely essential to be free of all base, materialistic desire. Desirelessness is the basic quality to be cultivated for spiritual success.

Hence, the uppermost step out of the four is **STEP 4**: "***Renounce all desires in the mind***". Everything that we learn is aimed to train us for this desireless state.

Freedom from Ego-consciousness: Now, what is it that makes us increase our desires? It is *Greed* for more and more things in life. This greed arises from a strong ego-sense. The ego always wants more and more. It wants to become bigger and bigger, stronger and stronger. Therefore, it can never stop wanting more and more things, possessions, fame, attention, etc. Part of the educational system must provide the training that will keep our Ego within limits. This is achieved creatively by diverting our minds away from the narrow individual ego and leading it towards its very opposite – a universal Being whom we name God.

Thus arises **STEP 3**: "***Dedicate all actions as worship of the Lord***." We are asked to offer all our activities at the altar of God, where they will be beyond the reach of the Ego.

Freedom from Restlessness: Working our way even further back, we ask What is the chief instrument which the Ego uses to expand itself? The answer is the *Mind*. If we can discipline our mind to focus itself on one thing well, then it will develop strength enough to say No to the Ego's demands. The mind must stop serving the Ego and become a master in its own right. We need to develop a well-trained and disciplned mind.

Thus arises **STEP 2**: "***Perform diligently the duties ordained by the scriptures***." By diligent striving, putting all our concentration on the work we do, the restlessness of the mind is brought under control.

Freedom from Ignorance: And finally, just one more step backwards. We need a sound knowledge of what the scriptures are prescribing to us. A wide knowledge, both secular and spiritual, is needed for us to begin our training. That is **STEP 1**: "***Study the Vedas daily***." Without knowledge, we walk blind-folded through life!

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THE FINAL DESIGN

Thus, by sound, logical deduction, we arrive at the four pillars of a sound educational system for the Brahmacharya stage of life. We repeat them once again, this time with a full understanding of what each step is designed to achieve:

STAGE	STEP	YOGA	ACTION REQUIRED	POINT OF FOCUS	FRUIT
BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA	1	JNANA	***"Study the Scriptures"*** *(Develop Thinking)*	Intellect	KNOWLEDGE
	2	KARMA	***"Diligence in Duties"*** *(Apply Will-power)*	Mind	PERFECTION
	3	BHAKTI	***"Dedicate Actions"*** *(Surrender Ego)*	Heart	DEVOTION
	4	DHYANA	***"Renounce Desires"*** *(Purify the Mind)*	Soul or Psyche	MEDITATION

THE FOUR PILLARS OF BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA

Step 1: "**STUDY** the Vedas daily." The fruit is our heritage of ***KNOWLEDGE***. It trains our *Intellect*. It provides us with a vision of life. It is the rock bottom foundation upon which all our other efforts rest. We must know what is in the vast body of knowledge called Vedas.

Step 2: "**BE DILIGENT** in performing all duties." The fruit is ***PERFECTION***. It trains our *Will*. It disciplines our mind and makes us strive for perfection. It focuses our energy so that it can be utilised constructively and efficiently for the maximum advantage to society.

Step 3: "**DEDICATE** all actions to God." The fruit is ***DEVOTION***. It trains our *Heart (Feelings)*. It limits our ego-sense and expands our consciousness beyond the narrow selfish ego. We offer our actions to a higher altar and learn to harmonise ourselves with others.

Step 4: "**RENOUNCE** the desires in the mind." The fruit is ***MEDITATION***. It trains our *Psyche* or spiritual being. It limits our desires and gives us a one-pointed, pure mind that is ready for Meditation. Desires have no end, but a ceiling can be put over them.

The above four Steps provide the basic training that we need in the student phase of our life. Equipped with them, we are well prepared to go through the rest of the journey without much difficulty. If we utilise this formative period towards these basic four pursuits, then the foundation is well-laid for the superstructure of our life to be built upon it.

An Important Exception in Brahmacharya Ashrama

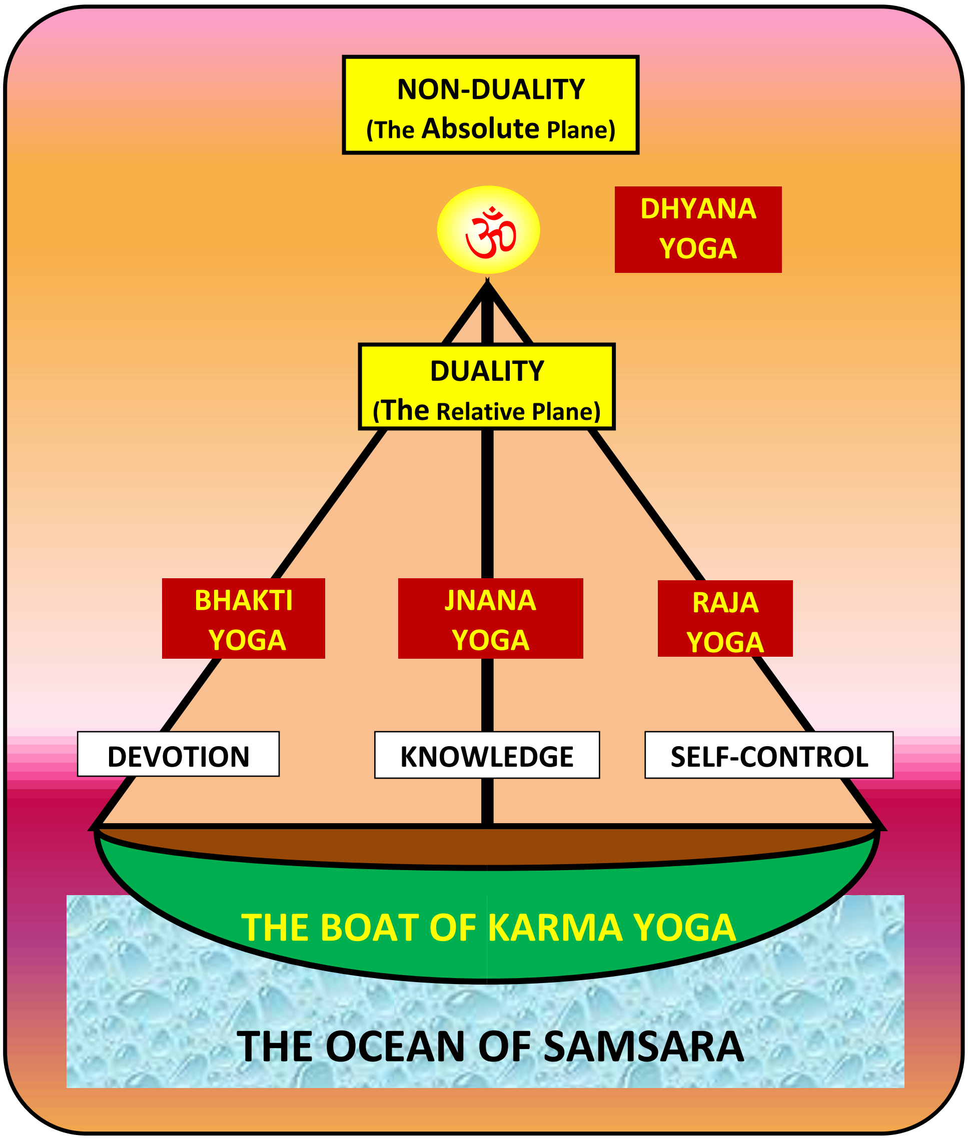
The Steps of *Sadhana Panchakam* are generally applicable to the stage of evolution a seeker has arrived at. Each seeker is catered for uniquely according to his stage of spiritual growth. This applies to all the Steps except the first four, pertaining to Brahmacharya Ashrama. The exception is due to the fact that in the Brahmacharya Ashrama, students are not differentiated, especially by caste, as regards their spiritual or social background.

In the Gurukulas of India, all students are treated alike. The Sudra, Brahmin, Vaishya and Kshatriya children all go to the same Gurukula and are treated in the same manner. The king's son studies side by side with the peasant's son. All have an equal opportunity to bring out the best that is latent within them. The first four steps form an Educational System, and hence they are common to the whole community.

The later steps are tailored to each person's aptitude and evolution.

In the next four talks we shall go through each Step in greater detail, covering one Step per talk.

THE BOAT OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION



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Verse 1: *ROOTS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE* (Steps 1-8)

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA – 1: Step 1

THE LIFE OF STUDENTSHIP

Step 1: वेदो नित्यमधीयतां *Vedah nityam adheeyataam*

Study the Vedas daily.

BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA IS covered in four steps. We took a look at all of them last week. Study is the first of them, and concerns the training of the intellect. If gathering of information were the purpose of Brahmacharya Ashrama, study would have been the *only* step necessary; but it isn't. True, studentship is about studies and the primary duty of a student is to study. But other training is also part of the package. Gathering of information only triggers off the rest of the education process.

Three other steps follow study. They stress the importance of how to use study to develop other aspects in life, namely, the development of skills to perfection (**Step 2**), the subduing of the ego by dedicating our actions to a higher altar (**Step 3**), and the calming of our mind by the control of desires (**Step 4**). All four Steps need to run together to form a composite whole.

How is all this training actually achieved in practice? Ancient India had an answer . . .

The Indian GURUKULA System

The arena for the whole education process is the *Gurukula*, a school system created by the sages of the Vedic period. The Gurukula resembles the boarding school of today, although there are important differences between them. The Hindu child is sent to a Gurukula at a very early age, and remains there roughly between the ages of 5 and 20. There he lives with his teacher for at least twelve years, visiting his home only occasionally.

The advantages of such a system are many:

i) *Intense Concentration*: The prolonged period of study and the absence of the distractions of home life intensify one's concentration level.

ii) *Relationship With Teacher*: The Acharya (teacher) and his wife take complete care of the children at the Gurukula. The setting is very homely and the child gets personal attention. The children develop a very close relationship with their Acharya. There is a parent-child relationship between them. It's another ideal condition for study.

iii) *Personal Supervision*: The sacred scriptures are learnt directly under the supervision of the Acharya. This is a great advantage in learning the correct pronunciation and intonation of words. Being under the eye of the Acharya helps the children to be corrected and moulded as they grow.

Because of the terseness and compactness of the Vedas, they should always be learnt under a qualified Acharya in the field concerned. At a higher level one seeks a spiritually competent person – a *Brahma-Nishtha Guru* – for gaining deeper knowledge.

iv) *Skills Training*: The homestead of the Acharya forms the field for the children to perform their duties and develop skills. **Step 2** is taken care of within the Gurukula itself.

v) *Religious Lifestyle*: There is prayer at the Gurukula every morning and evening. Sandhya Vandana is a daily ritual. Religious life goes hand in hand with study, and happens naturally without one being aware of it. Worship of God is an integral part of Gurukula life; **Step 3** is fulfilled.

vi) *Simple Lifestyle*: The life of simplicity that is fostered at the Gurukula provides the perfect training to curtail one's desires, just what is ordered in **Step 4**.

When the British came to India, they realised that the educational setup was far superior to their own. The colonial mind formed a strategy to destroy the indigenous educational system and replace it totally by the western system. This was done so discreetly that the Indians had no answer to this "intellectual undermining". The colonialists dubbed the Brahmins as promoters of the caste system. Economic considerations, too, played their role in the breakdown of the indigenous system. With the strength of Hindu society cut at its very roots, the way was clear for the colonial powers to take over the country.

The Fourteen Sources of Vedic Knowledge:

Vedah: "*the Vedas*". The Vedas are regarded as *Authoratative* in every field of knowledge. Every doubt or question can be referred to the Vedas for final clarification. Indian tradition builds on the firm rock of its foundational texts, the Vedas. There is something in the Vedas that meets the needs of every individual.

The entire fund of Vedic literature may be classified into 14 categories:

i) The ***4 Vedas***: Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. Some texts use the triple classification with reference to the Padas making up the verses. The *Rig Veda* comprises Niyata Padas or specific poetry verses. The *Yajur Veda* comprises Aniyata Padas or non-specific, prose verses. The *Sama Veda* comprises Niyata Padas which can be sung. *Atharva Veda* classifies into any of these three.

ii) The ***6 Vedangas***: *Siksha* (Vedic phonetics), *Kalpa* (rules pertaining to rites), *Chandas* (metrics), *Nirukta* (etymological formation of words), *Vyakarana* (rules of grammar) and *Jyotisha* (influence of bodies on each other, planetary influences or the science of astrology). *Vedic phonetics* takes into account the accent, the pitch or level, the measure or effort, the speed of articulating words, and the smooth flow of chanting.

iii) The ***4 Upaangas***: *Puranas*, *Nyaya*, *Meemamsa* and *Dharma Shastras* or Smritis.

These add up to 14 sources. Some consider the four Upavedas as independent to the Vedas, and so they arrive at 18 categories:

iv) The ***4 Upavedas***: *Ayurveda* (the science of healing), *Dhanurveda* (warfare), *Gandharva Veda* (music), and *Sthapitya Veda* (sculpture or Artha Shastra). Since they are found in the Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Vedas respectively, some say that they need not be counted separately.

Universal Features of the Vedas

Here are four characteristic Features of the Vedas:

1. Knowledge is Graded: Vedic knowledge is administered in doses, exactly like a graded course at school, according to one's age and capacity to understand, as well as one's need. For this reason, it may be split into *Karma Kanda*, *Upasana Kanda* and *Jnana Kanda* to cater for people in different stages of evolution.

2. Secular & Spiritual in Content: The Vedas refer to all knowledge, both secular and spiritual, i.e. Apara and Para Vidya. In modern times, "*secular*" in India has been gravely misunderstood to mean "*nothing to do with religion*". It should in fact mean "*connection with all religions*." The movement of growth is always from the secular to the spiritual, and there is no conflict between the two. Secular knowledge is about the laws that govern the manifested *external* world, while spiritual knowledge is about the laws that govern the unmanifested *spiritual* world.

Secular knowledge develops our ability to relate to the world; spiritual knowledge helps us to cultivate qualities of the soul. Unfortunately, today secular knowledge is thought of only in terms of getting a degree in management, science, engineering, accounting, law, medicine, etc.

3. Includes Ethics and Morality: The Vedas blend the study of the sciences with Dharma or the Science of Ethics. Dharma is very much a part of the teaching of every subject. Dharma deals with **Vihita** and **Avihita,** i.e. that which we should strive to do and that which we should avoid. In this sense, the Vedas *guide* and *prescribe*.

A strong element of discrimination is built into the Vedas. A student is taught to understand that whilst he may be free to do as he likes, it is better to choose correctly – to use the knowledge taught for the good of man rather than for his harm. Making the correct choice is very much part of his education.

Western educational systems tend to place matters of morality and choice in the background. The topic is given a glancing acknowledgement by introducing in schools a subject called "Right Living" that is free from religious bias. This is laudable, but it falls far short of achievement in the same field in the Gurukula system.

4. Has a Scientific Approach & Flexibility

It is grossly incorrect to say that the Vedas are outdated or archaic. The Vedas have a scientific approach to knowledge, both secular and spiritual. They focus on the fundamental principles that relate to a particular field of study, and deal with them in an integrated and concise manner. This style of the Vedas needs to be grasped.

This gives the Vedas a healthy, living *flexibility* in three different directions:

i) *Elaboration*: They are open to elaboration of the basic principles by careful thought and insight being given to every aspect of a subject being considered. They are the skeleton; the Acharya fills in the flesh around them. Hence it is important to learn them under an Acharya.

ii) *Adaptation*: Great Rishis come along in different ages to write commentaries on certain essential aspects of the Vedas and adapt the principles to the specific needs and circumstances of their age and times. Sri Shankaracharyaji did this around 1200 years ago; Swami Sivananda also achieved a similar revival of the essential knowledge for this age.

iii) *Interpretation*: There is an enormous flexibility in the interpretation of the knowledge to suit varied temperaments and levels among mankind. Great Acharyas have succeeded in developing excellent systems of philosophy founded on Vedic principles.

We have the *Advaitic* philosophy of Sri Shankaracharya which dates around 800 AD; the *Visisht-Advaita* philosophy of Sri Ramanujacharya dates around 1100 AD; the *Dvaita* philosophy of Sri Madhvacharya dates back to 1300 AD. The *Krishna Bhakti* movement of Sri Vallabhacharya dates back to 1500 AD. All of these systems are based on the Vedas, and they all have some useful role to play in the evolution of mankind. There is a freshness and vitality in the Vedas that renders them open to such treatment.

Importance of Daily Study

Nityam: This refers to one's daily duties, which is called Nitya Karma. The study of the Vedas has to be done "*daily*". There are good reasons for that:

i) Regularity is a means *to remember* this knowledge.

ii) It takes time *to absorb* knowledge properly so that it may be applied intelligently. Daily study gives the student time for knowledge to be digested.

iii) Daily study helps *to reinforce* knowledge. New ways of interpreting the same facts are unravelled each time we re-visit the same knowledge.

iv) The body of Vedic literature is a very vast heritage. *To preserve* this heritage its memorisation is allocated to different sections of the society, eg. the Dvivedis, Trivedis or Chaturvedis who commit to memory two, three or all four portions of Vedas respectively.

v) Daily study helps *to give priority* to the Vedas. It is easy to forget it or give it a low priority in the hum-drum of life.

The Science & Art of Studying

Adheeyataam: The use of this word for study is very significant. When broken down the word means "*to chant, listen and reflect*", i.e. Parayana, Sravana and Manana combined. It is a very *scientific process*. Chanting prepares the mind to receive knowledge. Then listening takes in the knowledge. And thirdly, reflection digests and draws out the nourishment from the knowledge. The ancient Indian sages knew the science behind studying.

Studying is also an art. Great skill is needed in the process of study. Teachers hold the highest responsibility to see to the spiritual development of the growing generation so that a healthy society can be built up. Indians have a very special reverence for knowledge, whether it is secular or spiritual. A learned person is always adored in the community.

A consequence of this is that society's teachers are chosen from the very best minds. Those who have a predominance of Sattwa in them (known also by the term Brahmins) are suited to fulfill this role. Not all Brahmins may be good teachers, but those who are very refined, cultured and disciplined in their own life make the best teachers of the Vedas, even if they are not Brahmins.

One may place a child from a Gurukula anywhere in the world – it will function according to the "circuitry" implanted in it by the revered Acharya.

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BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 2: Step 2
DUTY TO THE BEST OF ONE'S ABILITY

Step 2: तदुदितं, कर्म स्वनुष्ठीयतां; ***Tad uditam, karma svanushtheeyataam***

Perform duties ordained by the Vedas to the best of your ability.

THE TABLE OF THE Indian Educational system has four legs. In the last talk we have already dealt with the first leg, the study of the Vedas. Theory is gained through study of the Vedas. When we move on today to the second leg of the sudent's training, it is happening concurrently with the first leg. It is the same with the third and fourth legs. They all are happening at the same time. There is an organic growth of all the legs together.

One remains a student of the Vedas throughout life. The **Brahmacharya Ashrama** only gives the study a favourable boost in the right direction. This is supposed to inspire us to study for the rest of our life.

We also remember that all the four legs of Education are taking place in the Gurukula. Here, facilities are provided by the Acharya and his household for the complete training of the student.

The Duties Prescribed by the Vedas

Tad Uditam: "*Duties ordained*". These are duties prescribed according to the Vedas.

Karma: This is a technical term, having a specific contextual meaning, in spite of many other meanings of the word. In the science of self-development, Karma means *actions* performed as well as the *reactions* produced by such actions.

Vihita or actions approved by the Vedas are classified into 4 types. They are:

i) *Nitya Karmas*: one's daily round of duties. When performed well and regularly, they bring about our self-purification. They work out and reduce our Karmic bundle.

ii) *Naimittika Karmas*: the actions performed on special occasions – e.g. performing special family rites, attending community functions, celebrating religious festivals, etc.

The above two types of Karmas are also jointly called *Niyata Karmas*.

iii) *Kamya Karmas*: actions arising from personal legitimate desire. Kamya Karma is permitted to the extent that they do not deny others their rights and do not violate Dharma or the Laws of Righteousness.

iv) *Prayaschitta Karmas*: expiatory actions which are necessary to wipe away the effects of unknown Karmas from past births and those being done unconsciously moment to moment in this birth. Prayaschitta will be specifically dealt with in Step 5.

Scope of Work in the Gurukula

The student is given many tasks to do in the Acharya's household. Through these tasks, the household is kept running. So it is not just a laboratory exercise, but is actually

fulfilling an important function. The students virtually produce their own needs by engaging in these tasks. They take care of themselves under the direction of the Acharya and his wife. A *sense of responsibility* gets instilled in them.

In days of yore, the tasks would have been different from what we see children doing these days. Then it was mostly *agricultural work*. There was the chopping of firewood, for instance. The cows had to be tended; Lord Krishna as a child loved this task greatly and has given dignity to it. India's traditional love and care for cows has a rich scriptural support which comes from the life of Lord Krishna in Brindavan.

Then there are *basic survival skills*. Boys and girls, all had to share in the kitchen work of the Gurukula. They had to learn how to cook. They also learnt to swim at an early age; it's another survival skill. The boys were taught certain basic martial arts like archery and handling the lathi; these were needed for the protection of society.

Today the tasks may have a different nature, but their essential purpose is the same – namely, to survive. The content of the work is immaterial.

The supervision of the students by the Acharya and his wife, the Gurumayi, made all such tasks a Sadhana. And Sadhana is what this text is all about.

"BEST" of One's Ability

Swanushtheeyataam: "*done to the best of one's ability*". This instruction needs to be explored. There are two ways of looking at the word "best". They are:

1. Diligence: From an ordinary level, ability may be viewed purely as diligence. It pays to be diligent, to have a *hard-working disposition*. Diligence brings with it success in any venture. Although that is undoubtedly true and perfectly legitimate, it is only the "*fringe benefit*" of ability. There is much more to one's ability than just that.

2. Perfection: At a deeper level, one may view "best" as the desire for Perfection in work, regardless of any material gain, i.e. the *pursuit of perfection for its own sake*. This, too, will improve the profitability of the work, but the gain in character outweighs that.

To attain this perfection requires a *highly developed mind*, not just a hard-working mind. It requires a level of concentration of a very high order to keep focused on the details of a particular task. To be meticulous, orderly, neat, and fully focused brings out the "*hidden benefit*" of Perfection. These are found to be very essential for our Sadhana later.

Benefits of PERFECTION

i) *A Strong Mind*: We strengthen our mind by doing work perfectly.

ii) *A Controlled Mind*: Perfection provides the mind with the necessary training to make it sharp and one-pointed. A one-pointed mind is a great asset in any field of activity. In spiritual Sadhana it is especially indispensable in the practice of meditation.

iii) *A Present Mind*: Perfection maintains presence of mind. The mind stays in the now and here. "*Man is where his mind is*". The wandering habit of the mind is curtailed. It is not diverted to low, debasing levels which can easily creep in unnoticed if we are not fully present in or conscious of what we do.

iv) *A Busy Mind*: The mind is given little opportunity to become idle. "*An idle mind is the devil's worshop*". Remembering this, the striving for perfection provides the right atmosphere for a morally upright life.

<u>Individual Activity – SWADHARMA (One's Own Duty)</u>

Activity can be both individual and collective. One's Swadharma is that duty to which one is called upon in life, and is unique to each individual. In the ultimate sense everyone's Swadharma converges on *<u>God-realisation</u>*, for that is the purpose of all human life. But before getting to that point, each person's path is unique and he has to follow it dutifully.

The differences in people's Swadharma are due to differences in their Prarabdha Karma, their past which determines their mental make-up, i.e. the proportions of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas in their mind. Depending on this make-up, one's "caste" or individual duty is determined. This is the true definition of caste.

"*Better it is to do one's own duty than that of another; the duty of another is fraught with grave danger*," *Bhagavad Geeta*.

By adhering strictly to our duties alone, two important things happen:

i) Restlessness is checked. Rajas is controlled.

ii) We discover our own inner "caste", i.e. our inner constitution of Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas. We come face to face with our own strengths and weaknesses.

<u>Viewing "Caste" Positively</u>

Everyone has a rightful place in society, whether they are performing intellectual work or manual work. No one ought to be labelled 'good' or 'bad' because of *what* he does, but only because of what he is as a person.

Although the work may differ, the opportunity to evolve is given equally to all. In every category of work one can evolve. Human equality lies not in external equality, but in equal opportunity to evolve. It does not matter in what caste we are, we are all eligible to evolve into better human beings from the point we are.

From the social perspective, Indian society has been grouped into four 'castes'. Some disadvantage may be there because no system is ever perfect in practice. The vital point to bear in mind is that our spiritual progress depends solely on our own effort and on no other external factors, however disadvantageous they may be.

Our caste is never intended to keep us down or prevent us from progressing. If we make the effort to improve ourselves, we can imbibe better qualities, change the proportion of the Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas in us, and thereby qualify ourselves for more responsibility. By doing so, our role in society can change in accordance with our growth. The flaw we see in the caste system is due to not taking into account this "dynamic" aspect of caste.

<u>Communal Activity - YAJNA</u>

The scriptures describe as Yajna those actions which promote the well-being of the whole society. What are considered as *<u>duties</u>* at the individual level are *<u>Yajnas</u>* at the community level. They are the same actions, seen from two different angles. In other words, our livelihood and the well-being of society merge into the same activities. Whatever we do for our living should also be a Yajna that helps society to progress. That is the perfect ideal of Hindu society. This is what the Acharya inculcates in every child at the Gurukula. Harmony in society is possible when individual and collective activities merge.

In order that livelihood and Yajna merge into one, an *<u>organised effort</u>* is necessary. We need to work within the framework of an ordered society. Duties have to be allocated to individual students as they are to individual families later in life, according to the limitations

placed on us by our own nature. Having this in mind, the Lord in the Gita has created the fourfold caste system. By this system, appropriate duties are allocated to Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. The allocation depends on the predominant Guna in a person, and on nothing else. It is not a discriminatory system, but a thoroughly scientific system which makes all comfortable in their respective roles.

Fruits of Work Well-Done

Work performed diligently and perfectly brings the following benefits:

i) *Endurance*: doing things perfectly brings with it strength to endure difficulties.

ii) *Tidiness*: Shabbiness, untidiness, or a don't-care attitude is not Yoga; it is laziness.

iii) *Purity of Mind*: In the crucible of action, we become pure, just as gold ore has to go through a furnace for the pure molten gold to be extracted from it.

iv) *One-pointedness of Mind*: Perfection brings about single-minded focus of mind.

The Chain of Progress

Keeping the above overall picture in mind, whatever our duties may be, if we do them diligently, willingly and cheerfully then they lead to our rapid purification. The chain is:

i) When duties are done in the spirit of Yajna, i.e. for the common good, then *selfishness* has little scope to dominate our personalities.

ii) When selfishness is held in check, *purification* is rapidly increased.

iii) When purification is increased, we are prepared for *further development* in our spiritual life.

Therefore, students are taught never to do their duties grudgingly or with dislike. Purification comes from cheerfully doing our duties.

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BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 3: Step 3

FROM PERFECTION TO DEVOTION

Step 3: तेने शास्य विधीयतामपचितिः *Tene shasya vidheeyataam apachitih*

Dedicate all those actions as worship unto the Lord.

Introducing a New Simile

WE INTRODUCED IN THE last talk the simile of a table with four legs to represent the four Steps of Brahmacharya Ashrama. These are also the 4 steps of the Indian Educational System. Today, we introduce a new simile – something more dynamic that better represents the impact of education on the mind. The four Steps can be thought of as **Four Coaches** in a Train or the **Four Wheels** of a car, moving towards the goal.

Let us see what the student has covered in the previous two talks:

Step 1: He has *studied the Vedas* and obtained some basic knowledge;

Step 2: He has diligently *acquired the skills* to attain success and perfection in work.

With these two, he is equipped with Knowledge and Skill. As important as they are, they are not sufficient. On their own, they are secular in nature. These first two Steps are the two **secular coaches** of the train. They concern the vast information in the Vedas, and the preoccupation with work.

In case the student gets too carried away by them, Sri Shankaracharya has thoughtfully introduced two **spiritual coaches** into the education train. They are:

Step 3: the *Dedication of actions to God*, and

Step 4: the *Renunciation of Desires*.

These two Steps are actually two sides of the same coin. They go hand in hand. Step 3 *attaches* us to the Lord, and Step 4 *detaches* us from the world.

And what about the Four Wheels simile – where does it fit in?

DIRECTION in Life – A Spiritual Compass

Students need to be given a good direction in life. The proper goal has to be planted into the young mind. This is where the four wheels simile comes in. Through Steps 3 and 4, the Brahmachari is given a spiritual direction. They are valuable and timely check-points. Since they are giving direction to our life, they can also be thought of as the two front wheels in a car, while Steps 1 and 2, the secular steps, are the two back wheels.

A captain, pilot or an astromaut can get lost easily while travelling – out at sea, up in the sky or in outer space respectively; due to heavy waves, furious winds or losing contact with mission control. Each of them needs to make regular checks with his compass to avoid heading off in the wrong direction. In spiritual life, too, the student has to be introduced early in life to a spiritual "compass". The two spiritual Steps have this as their main purpose. Each of these Steps is so important that we will deal with them one at a time. Today we shall deal only with Step 3, and in the next talk we take up Step 4.

The Shortcomings of Perfection

In the previous Step we praised Perfection as a means to discipline ourselves and develop one-pointed attention in work . However, there are limitations to striving purely for Perfection without holding before us something higher:

i) *Feeding the Ego*: When Perfection alone is the aim, then there is the danger that it will feed the Ego. If we do not offer our work to a higher altar, then the Ego will steal all the glory for itself. Our Pride increases and that takes us further away from God.

ii) *Disgruntlement Among Co-Workers*: Perfection, when it is not in the context of spiritual life, has another disturbing effect. A man of perfection tends to enforce his ways onto others. If others are not equally aiming for the same height of perfection, they become a source of annoyance to the perfectionist. The perfectionist thus spawns disgruntlement among the people he works with. This is due to the perfectionist enforcing his perfection onto others.

iii) *Expectation of Premeditated Results*: Yet another weakness among perfectionists is that they develop an expectation of what the result of their action should be. The results of actions are the sole dispensation of the Lord, for He alone knows the full picture behind Karma. The perfectionist expects results to come according to his calculation. This is unrealistic. He is bound to encounter bitter disappointments if he does not spiritualise his attitude.

Thus we see that when a perfectionist goes too far with his perfection, he does great harm to his own spiritual growth as well as to that of others working with him.

This fact should not discourage the striving for Perfection, but should bring the striving to the altar of God. When Perfection is offered to God, it loses all the above dangers and disadvantages.

From Perfection to Devotion

Step 2 was driven by the urge to act with Perfection. It had its justified place there. Now in Step 3, we are driven by a force that is greater than Perfection; we are driven by Devotion to God. When Perfection is perfected, so to say, i.e. when it has done its job, we should open the doors of our life to Devotion.

As much as Perfection is a very important step, Devotion is found to be greater than it. We do not give up Perfection, but we offer it to God and place it under His direction.

> ***When we have climbed up the ramp of Perfection, we join the expressway of Devotion.***

A caterpillar does not leave the leaf on which it lives until it gets a firm footing on the adjacent leaf. Then it crawls over from one to the other. It is the same with us when we crawl from Perfection onto Devotion.

Dedication Superior to Perfection

It is very important for us to be convinced that Devotion is superior to Perfection, otherwise we will not be motivated to shift from one to the other. Here are some reasons that show the superiority of Devotion over Perfection.

i) Perfection itself can be *dry*, not emotionally satisfying. When love or Devotion enters the picture, we see clearly the difference between the two.

ii) What was <u>*hard work*</u> in aiming for perfection, becomes effortless in the presence of love. With love, one never comes to the state of boredom in work. Ask a mother if she ever gets tired of cooking for her family.

iii) What love can bestow, discipline can barely reach. The discipline needed to attain Perfection is in itself <u>*insipid*</u>; it is Love that sweetens it. Love is the perfect condiment that makes work intrinsically a pleasure!

From the above, we see that dedication of our actions to God not only reduces ego-centredness and increases God-centredness, but it also makes us do work cheerfully, enthusiastically, willingly and spontaneously. Really, we don't have to <u>*strive*</u> for perfection; if we have Love we can take a pleasant <u>*drive*</u> to it!

<u>Dedication to a Higher Altar</u>

The higher altar is what we call God. It could vary in height, as long as it is <u>*above*</u> the Ego. To start with, it could be the other family members; then it expands to the wider society; then to an institution; then to the country; from country it can broaden to all mankind; and from mankind to God Himself.

Dedicating ourselves to a higher alter has the following three benefits:

<u>*1. Stops Senses Running Outwards*</u>: It is said in the *Katha Upanishad* that our senses have a built-in defect, a manufacturing defect, by which they are "cursed" to face outwards, towards the sense objects. Due to this curse, we are extroverted by nature and our mind is pulled as though by a magnet towards sense objects. All the knowledge and all the skills we acquire in Steps 1 and 2 get utilised in drawing our attention outwards, away from the Lord seated in our heart.

The Katha Upanishad verse is only a euphemism. It is just being polite to us. It does not wish to offend us by pointing out the real culprit. What is it that really makes us go outwards? It is our **Ego**, nothing else. That is the real curse we have upon us.

<u>*2. Keeps Ego in Check*</u>: One strategy would be to divert our mind from Ego to something higher than Ego. We need to have something higher than it to dedicate ourselves to. That is the real purpose of Step 3 – to keep a check on our Ego by devoting our mind to something higher. By bringing God into our life, we <u>*squeeze out*</u> the Ego.

"God" is a mental concept whose purpose is to take our attention away from the Ego. Once we understand that then we begin doing everything as an offering to Him. This becomes a powerful means to divert our attention away from all narrowness and settle it onto something vaster. This is the principle that is involved in this Step of Sadhana.

<u>*3. Keeps Impurity in Check*</u>: Besides checking our Ego, the higher altar serves another purpose. It helps to keep a check on the impurities that swamp the mind. The root of impurity is forgetfulness of the Lord who dwells within. Life without God rapidly fills us with impurities such as anger, lust and greed. The sages or founding fathers of our educational system pin-pointed the solution as: **ATTACH-DETACH** – "*Attach the mind to the Lord; detach it from the senses*." It is this Attach and Detach that have taken shape as Steps 3 and 4 respectively.

The Indian sages taught the student as early as possible to perform actions in a spirit of surrender; to dedicate all actions to the higher altar. When we are travelling in an auto and a large-sized person steps in, one or two others have to get up and squat on the floor to make room for the new passenger. Our Ego has to get up when God walks in.

Meaning of True Dedication or Surrender

What do we mean by offering or surrendering our actions to God? What is being expected of us? During a havan, we say *"idam na mama"* after making each offering into the fire. In real life how do we say "*idam na mama*"? By delving a bit deeper into this question, we find that two things are expected of us:

1. *Pleasing God*: Prior to Step 3, we performed actions to please ourselves, to please our Ego. Now we are asked to divert our attention from the Ego and place it on God. Hence the immediate change required is to do everything to please God.

The God to whom we make our offerings could take many forms. The only point to bear in mind is that it must be someone or some Power greater than our Ego. We could serve the Guru, or serve an institution as a volunteer, or serve the sick and the poor in a way that is within our means. The very definition of a selfless act is that it is done to please others. Such an act is worthy of being "an offering to God".

2. Surrendering Ego: Surrender is not a slavish mentality as some people may imagine. It does not mean cowing down to a person in authority for fear of criticism or any other such notion. It is the voluntary surrender of one's ego with the full knowledge of all its limitations and defects. From the highest standpoint, such a thing as an Ego does not really exist, so we should give no importance to it. We should voluntarily surrender it.

By all means possible, *self-centredness* has to be thinned out and *selflessness* has to be installed in our heart. This is the essential meaning of Surrender.

CONCLUSION: Karma Yoga Blossoms into Bhakti Yoga

With this step the seeker places his first foot into the doorway of Bhakti Yoga. Conscious spiritual life begins when we have made room for God to enter into our life.

As our love for God increases, Karma Yoga becomes Bhakti Yoga. Karma Yoga and Bhakti Yoga can be practised by all seekers on the spiritual path. There are no restrictions or conditions in these Yogas. They are suitable for all mankind. Even the sages in meditation are doing service to mankind by purifying the mental world with their pure thoughts.

Gurudev says, "Serve, love, give, purify." Only then follows, "Meditate and realise."

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BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA (Contd) - 4: Step 4

LET US RECAP A LITTLE of the last talk. We had introduced a simile more dynamic than the table and four legs for the four steps of the traditional Indian Education System. The dynamism was needed to show that education *changes a person*. No one ever remains the same after going through years and years of training in the prime of his life.

An education empowers people. Their latent abilities start becoming active and blossoming. They start beginning to function with more skill, greater understanding and more confidence in themselves. They have *moved*, gone somewhere forward, not just remained static, especially in their mind.

To reflect this growth we changed the simile to the four coaches of a train, or the four wheels of a car.

Two Inseparable Pairs

The Secular Pair: First come the two coaches that sit in the middle. We refined the simile a bit and said they are the two *secular coaches* of Knowledge and skillful Action, the 1st Step and the 2nd Step. They form a pair and are inseparable. Without knowledge, action is blind; and without Action, knowledge is lame. The theory has to go hand in hand with the practice. Knowledge and action must work together as a pair. They form the rear wheels of the car that take most of the weight.

The Spiritual Pair: These are the two *spiritual coaches* of the train. The leading coach is the 3rd Step which attaches us to God; and the trailing coach is the 4th Step which detaches us from the world. They are inseparable, and work together as a pair. One pulls us forward towards God, the other protects us at the rear and breaks off our attachment to the world. Or, we can think of them as the two front wheels of a car, providing the direction.

With that brief recap and overview, let us move on today to Step 4, the last of the steps in Brahmacharya Ashrama. It is also the most difficult step to learn and to practice.

Step 4: **काम्ये मतिस्त्यज्यताम् ।** ***Kaamye matih tyajyataam***
Renounce all desires in the mind.

We now come to the crunch step in life, for which training has to start in the Brahmacharya stage. If we omit this training, life will become very hard later. A young plant can be straightened but when it becomes a tree, nothing will help to straighten it. This is the primary reason why Step 4 is included in Brahmacharya Ashrama.

Adding Desirelessness to Dedicated Action

In Step 3, we dedicate *all* our actions to God, including whatever Kamya Karmas we do. Let us fully appreciate the value of Step 3. It is no mean progress for a worldly man to offer all his actions to God, to think of God and then do even his Kamya Karma. By doing so, at least he starts moving from self-centredness to *selflessness*, a big move indeed. We should not underestimate the value of such a step!

There is no restriction to give up Kamya Karma in Step 3; the only condition is that it, too, has to be dedicated to God. This makes us mindful of what kind of desires we permit in our mind. If we are going to offer them as worship, we had better keep them clean!

Now, with the full value of Step 3 in our mind, we are ready to look at Step 4.

The Spotlight on Kamya Karma

In Step 4, Kamya Karma is specifically targeted for restriction, renunciation or better still, elimination. This may be very difficult for most people, but it is absolutely necessary from the point of view of our training. The question we ask ourselves is: "Can Kamya Karmas also be dedicated to God?"

It is a bit tricky to answer this question honestly. For apart from our daily duties and special occasional duties, we are quite happily performing many other things simply because we like them. We do not have to do them, but we do them only because of a personal preference for them. These classify under Kamya Karmas.

Example: Our eating habits are almost exclusively our own choice. We don't really eat out of a sense of duty, but because we enjoy food. That makes it a Kamya Karma. We go in for the best foods we can afford. The choice depends on our taste and affordability. We may have an expensive taste, but that is beside the point. As far as the scope of Step 3 goes, we are permitted whatever we like to eat and drink, as long as we place some on our altar for God as well!

In Step 3 we applied the *brakes on Actions*, by putting in the condition that we offer them to the Lord. Our aim was *to bring God into our lives*, and we did not mind the presence of some Kamya Karmas.

Now in Step 4 we apply the *brakes on Desires*. Our aim is *to introduce Desirelessness into our lives*. It is quite logical. Hence, Kamya Karma is put under the spotlight, as it were. We are required to do something about it.

When we apply brakes in a moving car, the car does not stop at once. It takes a while before it comes to a standstill. So it is with applying brakes on actions, and even more so on applying brakes to desires. We cannot give up our actions all at once, much less give up desire all at once. It is a slow, painstaking process, as we shall soon see.

Coercion Versus Conviction

The spirit of *Sadhana Panchakam* is not to impose rules to dictate our life. That is not the aim of Step 4 or any other step in Sadhana. We cannot renounce desires just by imposing a rule on ourselves. *Resolutions* can assist us to change, but in themselves they do not produce change.

Shankaracharyaji prods us onward, not through coercion but conviction. No one can be forced to give up desire. Desire will not allow us to do that. Try it and see how it springs back at us with vengeance. The mind recoils and snaps back at us. It is like pulling the bowstring back; the further back we pull it, the greater the force imparted to the arrow.

> *We need to* ***spiritually evolve ourselves out of Desire.*** *Spiritual progress cannot come through regimentation, but only through deep intellectual conviction based on deeper knowledge and experience.*

Students in their upper teens can ask themselves a few deep, probing questions: "Do I have the conviction, the patience and the right mental attitude to control my desires? How can I get the help of the Lord in my effort to overcome desires?" Only by looking squarely within can they come up with an answer from their heart. Through inner conviction alone can we succeed in this life-long struggle to check our desires.

Renunciation comes in the wake of ***personal experience*** we gain in seeing desires for what they are. Experience in life teaches us that there is no end to desires, no matter how much we satisfy them. The same Vedas which gave their consent to certain Kamya Karma at an early stage in our growth through the Karma Kanda and Upasana Kanda, also point the way to its renunciation later on in the Jnana Kanda. It expects us to *grow* out of Desire gradually.

Slow and Steady Process

As students we are taught early in life to control our desires, a little at a time. The Acharya at the Gurukula imposes certain limits, but he knows full well that all are not going to become Sannyasis! Young boys and girls *will fail and falter*, but at least they are making a start in practicing some form of self-denial. This is the spirit of Step 4. It provides a basic training for our entire future.

The level of instruction varies as we grow. An instruction in one level applies with the circumstances of that level. At a higher level, the same instruction applies under the new circumstances. This is especially the case with renunciation of desires, the most difficult of all human attainments. In the beginning the instruction permits some laxity. Later, one can make it as stringent as one likes. The bar of Sadhana gets raised as we progress in Sadhana.

When understood in this manner, spiritual instructions are found to *complement* each other, and not contradict each other.

Real Renunciation is of Desires, not Actions

Now we come to the next consideration. Kamya Karma or desire-prompted actions are being given up. That is fine – it's a step in the right direction. However, look carefully at the wording used by Sri Shankaracharyaji. He is not saying, "Renounce Kamya Karma", he is saying, "***Renounce all desires in the mind,***" i.e. renounce *Kama*!

The abandonment of the desire-prompted actions must be accompanied by the abandonment of the desires themselves in the mind. So we see that there is a lot of depth in this Step in Sadhana. When we grasp the full implication of this Step, we see that it calls for a major change in our *mental disposition* towards objects outside. Senior students, especially at secondary school and university level, can take a good hint from this.

Inner Resources Needed to Abandon Desire

Thus we find that giving up Desire is easier said than done. The task is a mammoth one, and calls for every ounce of determination we can muster in our mind and our will. There is a mountain before us!

This Step, when inculcated at an early age, reaps dividends later in life. It calls for patience and perseverence. No effort is wasted. Effort has to be sustained to avoid stagnation. As we progress in other Sadhanas, this one Sadhana goes on in parallel to the very end of our spiritual journey. In fact, it is the single true measure of our spiritual progress. It determines our overall progress in all the other steps henceforth.

CONCLUSION

Man may succeed in the most hazardous expeditions on earth; he has succeeded in landing on the moon; but to conquer the desires in his own mind is more difficult.

Most people, faced with this *daunting, Herculean task* in front of them, will prefer to just turn around and retrace their steps to a more "normal" life. But there is a spirit of heroism which awakens in the sincere spiritual aspirant, and a rare few souls do arise who are ready to lay down their lives to achieve some success in controlling the mind. One such hero was Gurudev Sivananda, and the world will forever thank him for his achievement.

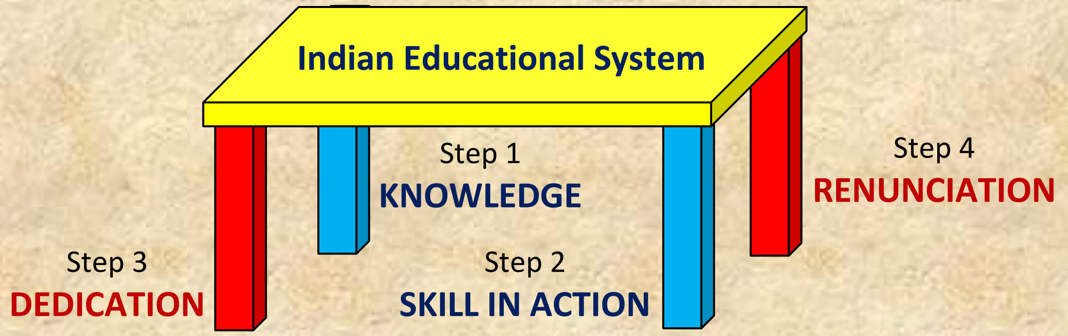
The *turning point* in our battle against Kamya Karma is when we understand that desire is a form of slavery to the mind. It does not bring happiness; it brings only a counterfeit version of it. The "happiness" it brings is really that of a restless engagement of the mind. The mind wants more and more attractions. The cycle never ends. The world cannot meet the demand for such happiness. Its promise to do so is empty. Sooner or later, the bubble of Desire has to burst.

Friends, if we do not acquire the habit of reducing our desires while we are still students, then painful experiences in the world, with its endless desires, awaits us later in the household life. But, if we do acquire it, we can confidently enter the "Big Stage of Life" – the formidable life as a *Householder*, which is where we go next.

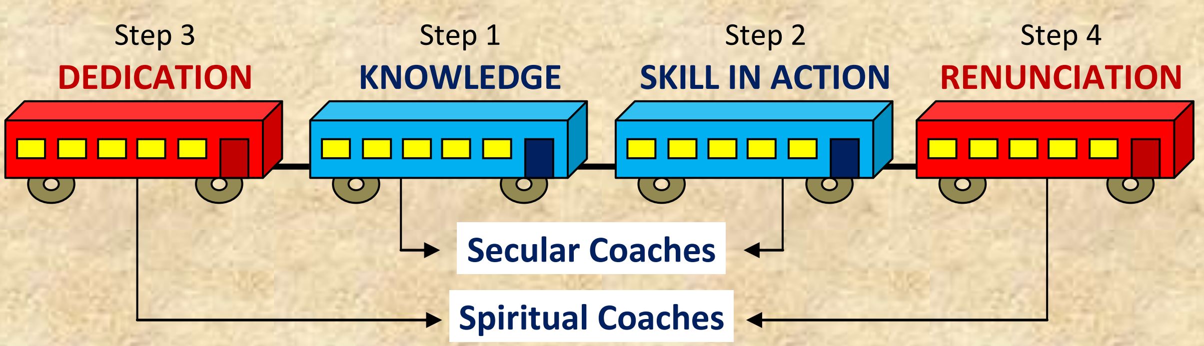
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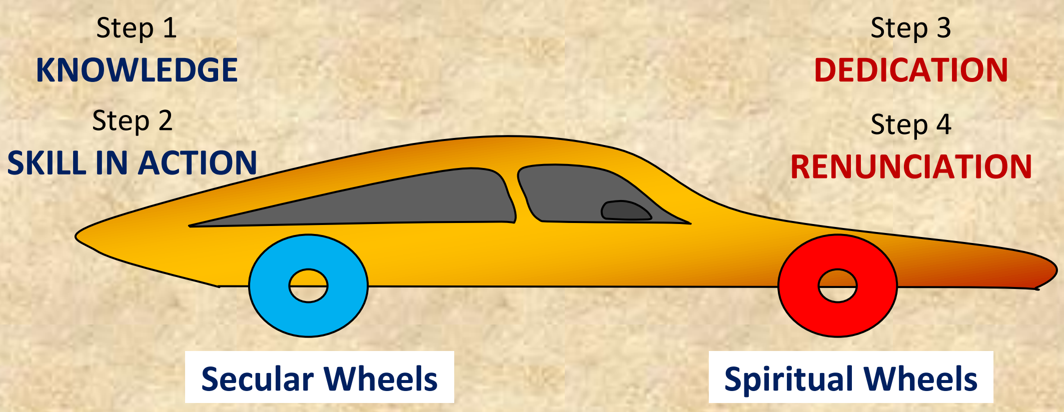
1. LEGS OF TABLE



2. TRAIN COACHES



3. CAR WHEELS



Similes for BRAHMACHARYA ASHRAMA



LORD RAMA & MOTHER SITA

An Exemplary Couple
Symbols of the Ideal HOUSEHOLD Life

2. GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA:
OVERVIEW OF THE HOUSEHOLDER'S LIFE

THE STUDENT RETURNS from the Gurukula and is well-equipped to begin the responsibilities of the next phase of his life – ***Grihastha Ashrama*** or the householder's life. He has just been equipped with secular knowledge and life-skills, and spiritual devotion and renunciation. The path towards success in both lies ahead of him. He has had the character building training deemed necessary by the Indian sages.

Now comes the real test of all that he has learnt and imbibed at the Gurukula. The most productive period of his life lies ahead, and it would take him from age 20 to age 55.

The Objective of Grihastha Ashrama

The object of entering the householder's life is to achieve some degree of *Chitta Shuddhi* or "*mental purity*".

> ***Successful Grihastha life is measured by the desire-bundle getting smaller, not bigger. Chitta Shuddhi is the goal of the Grihasthi, and is measured by the reduction in desires.***

How is this to be achieved? Mental purity comes from reduction of desires. Herein lies our ultimate spiritual good. This stage can be utilised for the gradual *thinning out of desires* as taught in the Brahmacharya Ashrama. However, experience has shown that, if one is careless, it can actually further or expand the scope of desires.

The Modern Environmental Pressure

Today enormous restraint over one's engagements in life is needed. We are living in an age when we are seeing an unprecedented leap in the communication field. There are now electronic gadgets in every home that can enable a person to get connected to all sorts of activities, to any information, to any person globaly, to any movie or entertainment programme, etc. The scope is mounting for the proliferation of desires as never before in human history. Do we simply yield to this wave or guard ourselves against it?

The pressure of social encroachment has become extremely high. Under the present modern conditions, some firm action is needed by every spiritual seeker to limit the intrusion of this pressure from our outer environment. If we ever hope to succeed in limiting our desires, then firm action on our part has become absolutely essential.

Under the circumstances that we find ourselves today, Grihastha Ashrama life is the area where this action is most needed. It is crucial for a householder today, who wishes to progress along the path of Sadhana, to selectively say "No" to this blast of communication from our environment, especially from the advertising agencies.

The sooner this lesson is learned, the better are our chances to reduce our desires and graduate to the next stage of life. This is the overall plan to work towards; this is what the devout householder is expected to keep in view at all times. He should not allow environmental forces to pressurise him in the householder life. If he does not learn to draw the line on desires, *he will remain a householder long after the age for it*.

The Knowledge Crucial for Householder Life

Every stage of Sadhana needs its own particular knowledge to accompany its practice. At no stage should the seeker think that he does not need any knowledge. The *integrated approach* is always necessary in Sadhana. Sri Gurudev was the prime exponent of this approach.

For a householder, it is crucial to have a sound knowledge of the following topics:

i) Paapa & Punya: In the householder stage, we first need to thoroughly grasp the concept of ***Paapa*** and ***Punya*** as it pertains to Hinduism. These are two technical terms that have a specific meaning, together with a philosophy attached to them. It is not sufficient to translate them as "*demerit"* and *"merit*". There is more to it than just that.

Paapa and Punya are *Adrishtha* or "*not visible*". They are subtle in nature, and can only be inferred by the effects they produce. If one sees a predominance of *favourable circumstances* in life, then we can say that the Punya is predominant. If, on the other hand, if one sees a predominance of *unfavourable circumstances* in life, then we can infer that the Paapa is predominant. This can be taken as a general rule, keeping in mind that what is favourable for worldly enjoyment could well be unfavourable for our spiritual well-being.

The Hindu view of Paapa and Punya is that both are impediments to our spiritual journey. This shall be explained in greater detail later on.

ii) Karma: Every action has an equal and opposite reaction called Karma. This is the Law under which Karma operates. Karmas are the seeds of action we have sown that we reap in life. The sum total of our Karma determines the destiny of our individual soul called Jiva. Every action we do sows into our life a seed of reaction. We cannot escape the effects of these seeds. They are lodged in our *Causal Body*, named so because it is the very cause of our taking this human birth.

Paapa accrues from sinful actions whilst Punya accrues from benevolent actions. When Paapa and Punya are not differentiated but treated equally as Karmic seeds, they are simply termed our *Karma.* Karma is accumulated over many births whenever we perform good or evil actions with desire (good or bad).

The total stock of all such Karma is called **Sanchita Karma**. The bundle of seeds which we have to work out in the present life is called **Prarabdha Karma**. The actions performed in this life which will fructify in the future is called **Agama Karma**, and gets added at the end of this life to our stock of Sanchita Karma.

iii) Samsara: Samsara refers to the cycle of births and deaths to which the human soul is subjected until it reduces its load of Karma to zero. If there is no reduction in this Karmic load, we are destined to take birth again and again in an *endless cycle*.

The accumulation of Paapa and Punya forms the fuel that propels us into Samsara or existence in this world again and again, birth after birth. Unregulated or indisciplined living combined with ignorant living (having no knowledge of the Laws of life) is the cause of this accumulation of Karma. These two factors increase the fuel of Karma.

The idea of reducing our Karmic bundle has meaning only when we begin to see clearly that the purpose of life is to liberate oneself from Samsara. If this purpose is not accepted, then we will never see the need to reduce our Karma. *We will go on living in a manner that will see Karma accumulating day by day.*

How Karma is PRODUCED:

Karma is ***produced*** through the performance of two types of actions: Kamya Karma, or desire-ridden actions; and Nishiddha Karma, or forbidden actions.

Kamya Karma: These are not duties but actions done because we like them. They arise from some selfish desire. The scriptures show us a way of fulfilling them legitimately by Dharmic means. However, even when fulfilled in this manner, they still give rise to Karma. This Karma brings mixed results, i.e. Punya and Paapa, positive and negative results.

When we limit or eliminate Kamya Karma, we do not reduce Karma, but we simply stop it from increasing. The fruit of eliminating Kamya Karma is summed up in **Step 6**, when we "***Recognise that the pleasures of sense objects are riddled with pain***."

Nishiddha Karma is action that is forbidden by scriptures. It is unlawful action such as murder, adultery, stealing, cheating, lying, etc, which have no scriptural sanction. They can be performed only by resorting to devious means. This Karma brings only negative results or Paapa. They are dark stains on our character. They produce the worst Karmic reactions such as diseases, mental anguish, physical disabilities, etc.

How Karma is REDUCED:

If the householder wishes to remain firmly on the spiritual path, he has to lead a life by which his Karma is *reduced*. Karma is reduced or 'worked out' by restricting them to just Nitya and Naimitika Karma; and by doing Prayaschitta Karma.

Nitya & Naimitika Karma: These are actions done as our daily or occasional duties. They are to be done throughout life and the surest way of reducing our Karma if done with the correct attitude as described in Step 1 and Step 3.

Prayaschitta Karma: These are expiatory actions for the atonement of unknown accumulated Karmas over many births. This Karma is described in **Step 5**, "***Wash away the hoards of sins in the bosom***".

Reduction of Karma leads to Chitta Shuddhi; and Chitta Shuddhi leads to spiritual blessedness in life. Step 5 and Step 6, may be seen as the *external Sadhana* in the life of a householder. They are related to each other as effort and the fruit of effort respectively.

Knowledge about Paapa and Punya, Samsara and how Karma is produced and reduced throws the full responsibility of Karma on the householder's shoulders.

The Internal Sadhana in Householder's Life

Step 7, "***Seek the Self with consistent endeavour***", directs our mind inwards towards the Self, our inner spiritual Being. It should be the constant endeavour of the ideal householder to hold this highest Goal in his heart throughout the Grihastha stage of life.

The Atman is the Self or pure Spirit within man from an individual standpoint. The same Self, when seen from the universal standpoint is called Paramatman or Brahman or the Universal Self. Realisation of this Self is the highest goal of life.

At all stages the householder is advised to live with discretion and discrimination; with dispassion and detachment. Sri Shankaracharya has carefully added **Step 8**, "***Escape from the bondage of Home***," by which the householder is strongly advised not to get attached to *home comforts*. He should never get attached to the pleasures of home life.

This is the fourth and final step of Sadhana in the life of the householder. Steps 7 and 8 together may be seen as the *internal Sadhana* in his life, as they require him to turn his

mind inward. Step 8 is complementary to step 7. Together they ensure that the householder does not lose himself in sense pleasure, the greatest danger in the householder stage.

<u>CONCLUSION:</u>

The recognition of the defects found in worldly pleasure (Step 6) is the fruit one takes away from living the householder stage successfully. It represents the dawn of genuine dispassion for the pleasures of this world. Such dispassion paves the way for the Vanaprastha and Sannyasa Ashramas that follow.

Dispassion is the certificate needed to go further in the journey to God-realisation. The Grihastha Ashrama ends when true dispassion dawns. Its job is then considered done.

We have had a quick overview of the householder stage of life. We have introduced all the four steps concerning this stage. In the next two talks, we shall go through the details of each of these four steps. First we shall deal with the External Sadhana of Steps 5 and 6; then we follow it up with the Internal Sadhana of Steps 7 and 8.

We shall examine each Step from a practical point of view, i.e. how it can be put into practise in the midst of the pressures of our modern environment.

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THE DIVINE MOTHER

MOTHER LAKSHMI (centre), who represents Wealth,
MOTHER SARASWATI (right), who represents Knowledge; &
LORD GANESHA (left), the Lord of Wisdom,
who uses both wisely!

GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 1: Step 5-6

UNBURDENING ONESELF OF KARMA

LAST WEEK, IN THE Overview of Grihastha Ashrama, we mentioned that the first two Steps for this Ashrama are the External Sadhana, and the next two Steps are the Internal Sadhana. Today we deal with the former. It is called "External" only because it concerns our transactions in the world. In actual fact, every action has an external and an internal component in it.

Karmic Banking

Today's portion, Steps 5 and 6, deal with Karma, and may remind you very much of an Accounting class.

i) In accounting, *Money* is accounted and balanced. In Sadhana, especially in the Grihastha Ashrama, Karma is accounted and balanced.

ii) The financial *bottom line* is Profit or Loss, and *transactions* of goods are done with customers. The Karmic bottom line is Paapa or Punya, and transactions of joy and sorrow are done with the world through our thoughts, words and deeds.

iii) The financial *accounts* are controlled by an Auditor and *disputes* are settled in court with a judge. Karmic accounts are kept by the Chitra Guptas sitting on our shoulders, and the Lord of Justice, Lord Yama, settles all one's disputes.

We recap that **Sanchita Karma** is the total amount we have in the Bank. From it, we withdraw **Prarabdha Karma** for spending in this birth. Then we buy and sell **Agama Karma** during our life, creating more Paapa or Punya. Some of that is spent in this birth. At death, whatever Agama we have not spent gets deposited into our Sanchita account.

For Karma, like money, is responsible for the impurities in our life, and for our taking birth after birth in this world. The idea in our Karma account is to make it *as small as possible*. Actually, it won't be a bad idea if we applied that to our money account as well!

Step 5	पापौघः परिधूयतां,	***Paapaughah paridhooyataam***
	Wash away the hoards of sins in one's bosom.	

The main concern of householder life is how to rid ourselves of all the Karma that we have already accumulated. After all, the central purpose of the householder's life is to increase *Chitta Shuddhi* which happens only by reducing Karma. This cleansing is necessary even if only for our intellect to be able to grasp things in their true light as we shall see in the next step.

"Washing Away the Hoards of Sins"

Paridhooyataam: This strong term is used here with deliberate intention. It means "*shake off violently*". The scars from old wrong deeds have to be shaken off in very much the same way as a dog shakes off water from its body by giving itself a vigorous shake!

The way to achieve this is through expiatory actions called **Prayaschitta Karma**. Prayaschitta is like the road tolls we pay. On the highway, traffic causes wear and tear of the road surface, and toll fees are needed to repair the road. In life, too, we have to pay with Prayaschitta in order to continue our journey. Hindu Dharma devotes considerable attention to this Karma as it plays a key role in reducing Karma.

There are two kinds of Prayaschitta Karmas:

i) ***Asaadhaarana*** – meaning "*not general*" or "*what is known*". These are particular sins *known* to have been committed by us. For instance, if a person has committed murder, there is a specific process prescribed for him by which he can remove the effects of it. Part of it may be to go through the experience of prison life, or loss of reputation in society.

ii) ***Saadhaarana*** – meaning "*general*" or "*unknown*". These are sins whose causes are *not known*, but which we can feel obstructing us from success. They are inferred from the presence of a blockage in the flow of energy within as well as from unfavourable circumstances outside for which we can find no explanation.

Practical Aspects of Prayaschitta Karma

1. ***The Lord's Name*** is the most common form of Prayaschitta Karma. It is a balm that works wonders. All the saints are unanimous in their advice on the glory of the Lord's Name. There is no escape from this Prayaschitta.

2. ***Devotional acts*** of service are a key part of Prayaschitta. The Lord in turn does His bit for us. He lifts the burden of the past and removes the stains of Karma. He also removes the tendency to do the same wrong again.

3. ***A dip in the Ganga*** is all that is needed to wash away our sins. Sins are not real entities. They are part of the unreality of Samsara. They are merely skin-deep, and so just a dip in sacred waters is said to be enough to wash them off. That is the philosophic meaning.

4. ***Sin is a scratch*** on the surface of our real Being. If we live on the surface, we will feel the scratching! We should never feel that we are helplessly bound by our sinful habits. With effort and determination we can break up any bad habit.

5. ***A clean confession*** is a most effective method to clear out long-standing blockages. Gandhiji once stole his brother's chain. The feeling of guilt was very deep. Gandhiji resolved to confess his action and come clean with his brother. The effect was virtually immediate. The pain of confession is itself expiatory.

6. ***Apology and forgiveness*** work hand in hand as a pair. Apology draws forth forgiveness from the other party. Apology is the horse which pulls the cart of forgiveness.

7. ***Fasting, pilgrimage*** and ***penance*** – these are common forms of Prayaschitta in which one deliberately puts oneself through hardships. Traditional pilgrimage or Yatra is done without luxury and comfort.

8. ***A resolution*** should always follow Prayaschitta Karma – *" I shall never do it again."*

Step 6: भवसुखे दोषोऽनुसन्धीयतां; ***Bhavasukhe doshah anusandheeyataam.***

Recognise that the pleasures of sense objects are riddled with pain.

The intellect requires to be fairly purified to assimilate spiritual ideas or to sustain the spiritual way of life. An impure mind will not be able to support a life of refined ideals,

and will actually rebel against and criticise it. When after diligent Niyata Karma (duties) and fiery Prayaschitta Karma (expiatory actions), our Karma gets reduced and some degree of purity of mind is attained, the eyelid over the "*Eye of Knowledge*" gradually lifts up and we begin to get a glimmer of the most important turning point in spiritual life – ***"Recognition that sense pleasures are riddled with pain."*** This is the step that finally pulls the mind away from Maya's external glitter and draws it inwards towards the ever-luminous Self.

Sufficient amount of purity is needed to recognize this fact. An impure mind cannot see it. The cleaning out of Karma is mainly to render our minds sufficiently pure to recognize this truth about life:

> ***"Worldly pleasures are evanescent and fleeting. They carry with them no hope of lasting happiness. An ounce of happiness is drenched with tons of sorrow."***

This was the point that Dr Kuppuswamy in Malaya, came to see as clear as daylight. He took it to heart and acted with the courage of his conviction. He forthwith returned to India, abandoned the life of luxury he had got so used to, and became a wandering Sadhu. He had come to the turning point in his life. He was only thirty-six years of age when the call came to him strongly to renounce worldly life for something unimaginably higher. Out of Step 6, a Swami Sivananda was born.

Step 6 is indeed a crucial point on our spiritual journey. It is also the crowning glory of the householder's life. Recognising that pleasures lead only to pains, the householder virtually comes to the end of his household stage. Steps 7 and 8 then become only formalities for him. He becomes ripe for the Vanaprastha stage, or in exceptional cases such as Dr Kuppuswamy, directly for the Sannyasa stage.

However, it is not as easy as it may sound. Here is what it entails:

The Defects in Pleasurable Objects:

A great saint has said, "A dog may stop licking his bone, but the mind will never stop licking pleasure!" By remembering the following defects inherent in all pleasure, it may help us to develop dispassion towards the objects of pleasure.

i) Dullness of Mind: A bout of pleasure is followed by enormous dullness of mind. Rich foods and overeating bring on dullness and lethargy. It is the same with every other form of sensual indulgence. Notice how little a good student eats, because he wants to be alert to study.

ii) *Objects are Infinite*: The objects of the world are infinite; and so logically we need infinite time to enjoy them. We cannot have them all in one lifetime. We need many lives to enjoy all that we desire. This really means there is no end to worldly life. It is a never-ending chase from one object to the next.

iii) *Objects are Impermanent*: Even when we get some pleasure it is not lasting. The objects are all impermanent, so the pleasure from them is also impermanent. The world dangles a carrot before us; it promises us something which it cannot fulfil. It makes vain promises of endless pleasure.

iv) *Pleasures Enslave*: Since the pleasure from an object is impermanent, we need to obtain it again and again in order to satisfy our desire. This means we become slaves of the object of pleasure. Our mind is not free, but is locked to the objects we desire.

v) *<u>Pleasures Scatter Our Attention</u>*: Every pleasure we are attached to takes away a slice of our attention. With mounting pleasures, our attention becomes completely scattered. Our energy follows our attention and gets dissipated into numerous channels. This leads to stress and tiredness. There is no energy left for the spiritual journey.

vi) *<u>Pleasures Get Intensified</u>*: In addition to enslaving us to the objects, the pleasure itself needs to intensify in order to satisfy us. We need stronger and stronger doses of it to obtain full satisfaction. We are thus addicted to pleasure as an alcoholic is addicted to alcohol – we need more and more to satisfy ourselves. In the end we are totally demoralised by our addiction to pleasure.

<u>The Real Defect is in the MIND</u>

But laying the blame on objects is a an eyewash, a *<u>BIG LIE</u>*! For truly speaking, it is not the objects of the world that enslave us. No object in the world has the power to enslave us *if we do not allow it to*. If we can pull in the reins of our mind, nothing can enslave us from the outside. The mind holds the key to our enslavement. We must prevent the mind from ruminating on the haunts of pleasure.

That is what we shall take a close look at in the next talk, when we look at the inner aspect of Sadhana for a householder. A brief preview of the next talk would be:

<u>The Simile of a Chariot</u>: The mind is represented as the reins of a chariot, with the intellect as the charioteer holding the reins. The senses are the horses. The Jiva or soul is the owner riding in the chariot. The road represents the world of objects which the chariot travels on. Only if the horses are reined in by a good intellect, the journey will be safe.

<u>CONCLUSION</u>

Handling one's demerits has two aspects: One is our responsibility and the other is God's. Our responsibility is to root out our Vasanas. God's part is to administer the fruits of our Karmas. If we co-operate with God by doing our Prayaschitta and Nitya Karmas, His task is made easier. This is the sequence that follows:

1. When we have sufficiently reduced our bundle of Karma, purity will increase.
2. Increased purity will enable our intellect to begin to see more clearly.
3. We will then clearly recognize that the pleasures of sense objects are riddled with pain.
4. Then we are ready for the inner steps, Steps 7 & 8, which shifts our attention from the world to our Self. We shall take this up next week.

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GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 2: Step 7-8

REMAINING UNTAINTED BY "HOME " COMFORTS

WE CONTINUE WITH THE second half of the Grihastha Ashrama. Last week in the first half, we discussed Steps 5 and 6, the external Sadhana dealing with keeping our Karma account as low as possible. We saw how that turned out to be very similar to an accounting class; instead of *money* we were dealing with Karma, instead of *profits* we were concerned with Paapa and Punya, instead of *customers*, we were transacting with our thoughts, words and deeds, instead of dealing with *auditors*, we dealt with the Chitra Guptas sitting on our shoulders, and finally instead of settling matters through the *judge* of the law courts, we had to come face to face with an unbribable, uncorruptible Lord Yama, the lord of justice!

It is true that from the general standpoint the household life is bound from head to foot around some activities. Wherever there is activity, there is the danger of a build-up of Karma. We learnt which activities produce Karma and which ones reduce Karma. We highlighted Prayaschitta Karma or penance which reduces both the known and the unknown Karma that affects us as negative influences in life.

However, household life is not only about an endless round of activities. It has its spiritual side, too, which we should not lose sight of. Whilst the earning of wealth is the primary duty of the householder and certainly involves activity, the householder has to continually keep at the back of his mind the divine purpose of life as a whole. For this reason two steps have been added in by Sri Shankaracharya to ensure that the householder's life is well-anchored in spirituality. They are **Step 7** and **Step 8**.

Step 7: आत्मेच्छा व्यवसीयतां, ***Aatma ichhaa vyavaseeyataam***

Seek the Self with consistent endeavour.

Preparing Ourselves for the Higher Seeking

Preparation for the Grihastha life lies in the Brahmacharya life. Seeking wealth and fulfillment, i.e. Artha and Kama, comes from the two secular steps of Brahmacharya Ashrama that equip us with *Knowledge* and *Skill* in action.

Similarly, seeking a God-centred life, i.e. Dharma and Moksha, comes from the two spiritual steps of Brahmacharya Ashrama that equip us with *Dedication* to God and *Renunciation* of desire.

Thus we see that, in our years at the Gurukula, we are given the perfect preparation for entering the household life, both materially and spiritually. If we did not get this early training, we need to make up for it in the household stage.

Seeking the Self

What does it mean to seek the Self? This is actually not an *activity* at all. It just requires *being* in our inner roots, finding our centre of happiness and contentment.

This is not meant in a selfish sense. Clearly, everyone has the same basic *spiritual needs* , even as we have the same basic *physical needs*. We share the same in spirit as we do in body. Spiritual seeking brings us to a deeper and closer understanding of the needs of other people. We learn to gradually think in the shoes of others. In practical terms, this is what "*seeking the Self*" really means. It is far from a selfish pursuit.

What guidance do we have on this from the scriptures? The Truth stressed in the Upanishads is that the Self is universal, It is beyond our own narrow individual boundaries and concerns. Seeking the Self really means getting to know how *unlimited* we really are. Far from becoming more *self*-centred, we expand when we become *Self*-centred!

A new dimension of growth is added to our life. Our concern shifts from our own little circle to an ever-widening circle of humanity. Our boundaries widen. The parameters are no longer just "*me and mine*" but "*we and ours*" and that, too, not in any narrow selfish sense. Broadening our outlook is the real meaning of "seeking the Self".

Consistent Endeavour

The above-mentioned change in our outlook may start in small bursts. When we are in the right mood we get flashes of inspiring glimpses of life in the Self. Eventually, however, Sri Shankaracharyaji expects us to become more consistent in our efforts to expand. "*Consistent endeavour*" is what we should be moving towards.

Spiritual growth does not come in an instant. Spiritual *expansion of consciousness* is a very slow process, different from any material enterprise. Many old habits have to be un-learnt and new habits formed. We need to patiently apply ourselves to the task.

People have tried to get quick results by using drugs. Neuro-scientists are attempting to alter mental states by manipulating the brain. But these methods make us more rooted in materialism and take us away from the Self. Modern life has many "instant" blessings – we have instant coffee, instant porridge, instant fast foods. But no one has yet invented a micro-chip for instant expansion of consciousness!

Spiritual evolution is not a revolution – it takes much time and sincere effort. That is what makes it a Sadhana. Adjusting ourselves to a new spiritual vision is painstaking Sadhana. The sooner we start the better.

Standards to Measure Spiritual Growth

The standards used to measure spiritual progress are almost the opposite to those used to measure material progress. Assessment of our spiritual growth would certainly require some guidance from other more experienced people, and in particular from our Guru. It is not something which can be done using the common standards of the world.

However, there is one sure standard by which spirituality can be gauged. It is the aura and glow that we radiate. Our spiritual aroma will speak for itself. The rose does not have to announce its fragrance to the bees. They will alight upon it of their own accord if the fragrance is there. It is the same with spiritual fragrance and aroma.

Now for the second spiritual Step for the householder . . .

Step 8: निजगृहात्तूर्णं विनिर्गम्यताम् ॥१॥ ***Nijagrihaat toornam vinirgamyataam***

Escape from the bondage of "home".

What is "Bondage of Home"?

Bondage of home could mean different things to different people in different stages. If taken literally, this Step could alarm most people. After building a home with so much effort and patience, are we now being asked to just abandon it? One may even feel "What do these Swamis think they are!" There is no need to get prematurely alarmed.

Every spiritual instruction has its proper time and place. *There is a Rationale in Sadhana*, which must surely have been noticed by now. Yes, there is a time later when one literally leaves home. That is when 'home' has done its job, and a new phase begins. The Sannyasi is an eagle – when he flies out of his nest, he does not return back to it!

However, for a householder "***Escaping from the bondage of home***," means he should not be attached to it. This is difficult enough for him. How do we remain detached from our own home? If we think of this we find that it calls for a very special mental ability. And this ability is so rare in this age that it may well be easier to *abandon* home than to be detached from it!

For the householder, it is sufficient that he remains guarded against too much attachment to the comfort of the home and the security of living with one's family.

The "Mine-ness" of Home

What is the problem in remaining detached? The answer is given through the following illustration, which is quoted from Swami Chidanandaji's new book, "*Talks in South Africa*". Swami Chidanandaji writes (slightly adapted):

> *Suppose you are waiting at a bus-stop. Fire engines are rushing, bells clanging, sirens flitting. You are not very seriously concerned. You get into the bus and your journey starts. Then someone tells you that the fire appears to be in 'your' area; you look at the smoke rising and see that it is coming from 'your' road. Then a chill catches hold of you. You are gripped by a strange anxiety, you become a changed being. Immediately you are in a terrible state and have no peace of mind. "O God! It may be 'my' home? And if it actually happens to be 'your' home – finished! Your world starts falling apart.*
>
> *This is 'mine'-ness, that special state of mind with regard to that particular object or thing. If a bank crashes and goes into liquidation, you are not bothered – provided you have not invested in it! You simply continue your cup of coffee. But if it happens to be 'your' bank and all 'your' finance is invested in it, then – Oh! your coffee falls down and you run to the phone. Then you are like the cat on hot bricks. What has happened? Have you pondered over this?*

That is an insight from Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj, and he was not a householder. Yet, the insight is poignant. Ownership of home gets 'mine'-ness associated with everything about it – the family, the garden, the trees in the yard, the decorations in the rooms. That is what Step 8 warns us about. How can we overcome 'mine'-ness?

Sadhana to Overcome "Mine-ness"

To live without this mine-ness requires some spiritual Sadhana in one's training. One cannot put an *activity* to this Sadhana. It is an inner state of mind. The mind has to change.

The clue is *Love for God*. Devotion is a key factor in making an adjustment in this regard. When it arises in us, it is irrepressible. It forces us to take to unchartered territories. A *spiritual daring* is sparked off by devotion to God.

We are speaking of removing the sense of 'mine-ness'. The householder who is able to do this is a hero indeed. He pits himself against all odds in a society that presses him to cling to his home at all costs. The crucial factor is to make the 'inner' change of attitude towards Home. Once we are inwardly detached in our relationships with our family members and emotionally able to relinquish the safety and security of home, then an amazing thing happens: We actually discover that to "Escape from Home" is not such a difficult thing after all. We taste a bit of that when we move to a new home.

The external change of environment can be looked into only when the inner change happens. We are drawn to a simpler lifestyle that is considerably toned down from what we have been used to. In India, many families adopt this approach as they near the end of their household function. In Western societies, the transition may be more difficult, and can sometimes be more painful as it gets thrust upon one by family or social circumstances.

Conclusion: The Householder's "CROSS"

Searching for a suitable symbol for the householder's life led me to choose the Cross, as it ideally represents the spirit of sacrifice and heroism needed in this all-important stage.

The two arms of the horizontal post represent the two secular steps, 5 & 6. The vertical post represents the two spiritual steps, 7 & 8, as seen in the accompanying diagram.

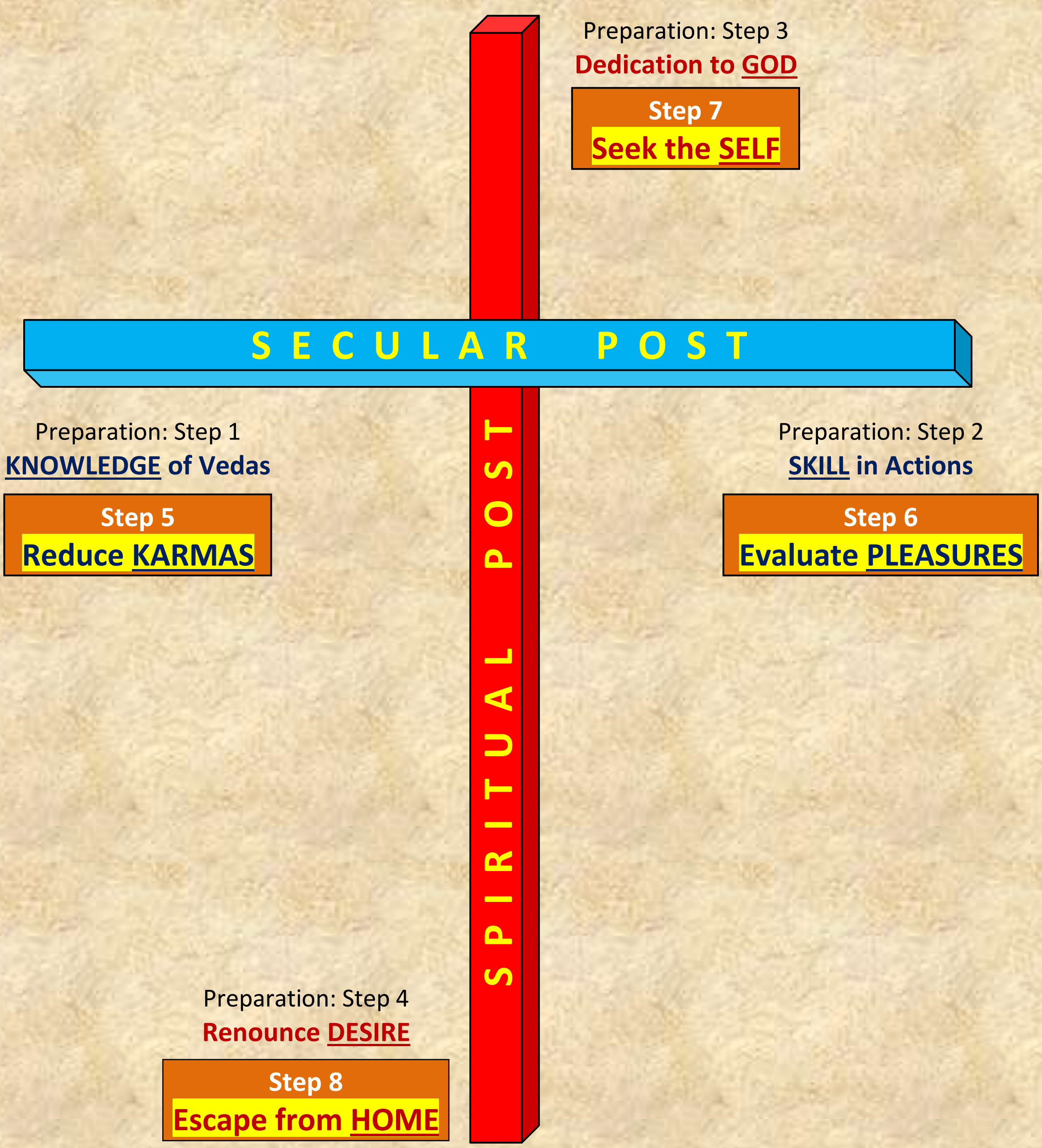
The Horizontal Post: Step 5 bears the fruit of *Chitta Shuddhi* or purity. This is achieved through doing one's duty well, and doing sufficient Prayaschitta Karma to expiate ourselves from the grip of our past. With purity comes Step 6, when the *intellectual discrimination* develops to recognise the worth of sense pleasures.

The Vertical Post: The householder, equipped with cultivation of the devotional temperament, finds it easy to follow Step 7, to direct his household life towards the seeking of God. There is no conflict here. It gives him strength to remain free from temptations such as bribery, corruption and falling prey to illicit pleasures. Step 8 ushers in the ultimate test of Detachment. This is an *inner quality*, not an outer accomplishment. It is the 'Certificate' that declares he has graduated out of household life and is ready for the life of retirement.

Once this quality is sufficiently established, the stage is set to shift into Vanaprastha Ashrama with the natural ease of a caterpillar leaving one leaf and climbing onto the next.

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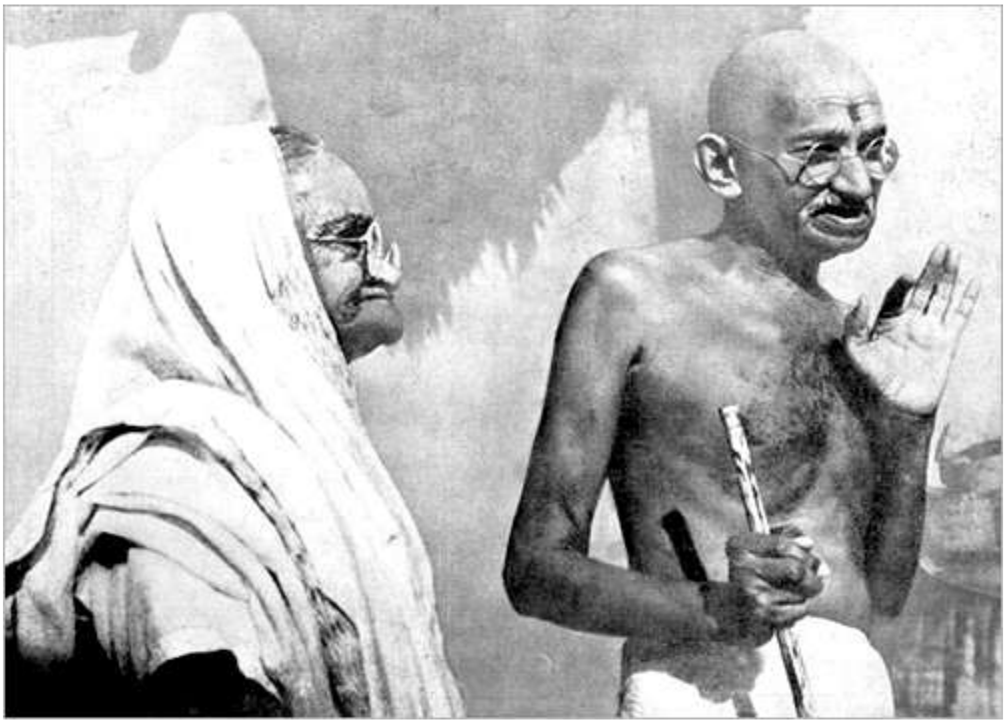
"The Cross Borne by the Householder
***SUPPORTS** all the other three Ashramas.*
It is the Kingpin of Hindu Dharma.

The Grihastha Ashrama life embodies the
*high Values of **SACRIFICE, CHARITY & SERVICE**"*

Simile for GRIHASTHA ASHRAMA



As Grihasthis in South Africa



As Vanaprasthis in India

GANDHIJI & KASTURBA

The Ideal of Indian Grihastha & VANAPRASTHA Life

BEFORE WE MOVE on to discuss Vanaprastha Ashrama, I wish to add something very important to round off the Grihastha Ashrama which was concluded last week.

We had introduced the simile of a Cross for the Household Life, but did not sufficiently bring out its significance. Swami Sivananda writes:

> ***"The Cross borne by the householder supports all the other three Ashramas. It is the kingpin of Hindu Dharma. The Grihastha Ashrama life embodies the highest in the values of Sacrifice, Charity & Service."***

The Great Hindu Ideal of Household Life

The Grihastha life as envisaged by the Indian sage, represents a very high and noble ideal. In India there are several exceptional qualities for which householders are honoured given pride of place in Hindu society. These are:

i) **Giving Food Charity**: It has become proverbial in Indian households to give food to the unexpected guest, to give to wandering monks and Sadhus, to give to beggars and to the poor and needy. The giving of food is considered a very high form of charity, and the Indian householder excels in its practice.

ii) **Pativrata Dharma**: This is the exceptional quality of fidelity that the Indian wife has towards her husband and *vice versa*. It is at best appreciated in other countries, but in India this quality reaches such proportions that husband and wife see each other as Deities!

We have the example of Lord Rama and Sita in the Ramayana. Their fidelity to each other stands out as an example to all mankind. Mother Sita went through the fire ordeal to prove her chastity. However, doubting minds were not satisfied with that. Eventually, by the power of her chastity, she appealed to Mother Earth to take her back to the heavenly regions. Mother Earth obliged by cracking open Her surface and taking Sita into Her folds.

In recent times we see the exceptional Pativrata Dharma of Kasturba and Mohandas Gandhi. When Gandhiji, at the age of 37, decided to observe the Brahmacharya vow for life, Mother Kasturba was ready to follow his wish and gave him her fullest co-operation. Gandhiji was thus able to lead a chaste life which empowered him with an enormous will to uphold his cause of passive resistance in the political field.

iii) **Care of the Aged Parents**: Another very noble value we see in Indian households is the care that is given to aged parents. This may be changing in the present age, but traditionally Indian households upheld this family value. I am not just trying to paint a good picture of Indian culture, but it is a fact that can be seen in wide practice even today.

iv) **Value Placed on Education**: In the Indian tradition, we see a high place is given to the education of the children. Parents go out of their way to give their children the best education they can afford. It is a matter of great family pride to see one's children get well qualified to earn well.

In South Africa, due to racial segregation, education became the responsibility of each racial group. Among the three disadvantaged races, the Indian community made huge sacrifices towards the training of their upcoming generation.

v) **Sacrifice of Personal Need**: The Indian ideal of personal sacrifice is taken to rare heights by some of its most well-known householders. There are many famous Puranic stories about the sacrifice made by householders for others or for a good cause. During the freedom struggle we hear of thousands of people who came forward to lay down their lives for the cause of India's freedom. The Indian household can take much credit for this, as sacrifice is a value it is committed to uphold.

In the above ways and more, we see the richness that underlies the household tradition in India. Having sung its glory, I now feel we can move on to our next topic with the blessings of all those sincere householders who are keeping the above ideals alive. Successful household life paves the way for a successful life in retirement.

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3. VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA

OVERVIEW OF THE LIFE OF RETIREMENT

What is Vanaprastha Ashrama?

TO TRANSLATE THIS word as Retirement does not do justice, Retirement merely means "the end of one's working life". That is hardly a fair definition of Vanaprastha. At best it is half the definition. The literal meaning is "*established in the forest*", which is clearly some sort of a symbol. ***Forest*** represents a place less populated than the busy, working area of agricultural ***Plains***.

The word 'Forest' indicates something untouched by the hand of man, something made by God Himself; it points to a life of solitude and seclusion; it signifies a return to our original home, back to Godhead, our original Source. We were all forest-dwellers or *Bipin Beharis* at one time, as Krishna was called.

Nature's Plan – The Two Phases of Life

As the sun sets at the appointed time, so also the Active Phase of life has to set and a new phase of quiet dignified withdrawal begin. Take the example of traffic over a 24-hour period – there is a frenzy of vehicles during the peak hours of day; but as night approaches everything quietens down. With the clearing of traffic congestion, driving becomes less stressful. In life it is the same – as activity reduces, stress reduces and more thoughtfulness enters our life. The curtain falls on the active lifestyle, and gracefully lifts on a new quieter vista before us. This is Nature's Plan, and those are wise who accommodate and adjust to it.

Throughout the world weof living beings, we see the broad plan of Nature. If viewed positively and welcomed, the phase of withdrawal from activity in the world has great potential for our *spiritual* growth. Body-related life takes a dive, but the spiritual life comes to the fore. At the moment of death, it is all we take away with us.

By having a plan we get an idea of where we are heading. The whole train of life is heading ***Godwards***. The seeker of God takes a closer look at the spiritual Goal of his life.

Let us see the transition graphically.

A. The Upward Curve:

The ***Brahmacharya*** and ***Grihastha*** Ashramas fall in this phase of life.

Modifications in this phase are i) *Existence*, ii) *birth*, iii) *growth* and iv) *maturity*.

This is the period of *Expansion*. In the first fifty or so years, our energy rises to its peak. We are active in body and mind, producing something and making our contribution to this world. There is an expansion at all levels in our expression in the world.

B. The Downward Curve:

The *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasa* Ashramas fall in this phase of life.

Modifications in this phase are v) *decay*, vi) *death* and back to i) *Existence*. The modifications form a complete **LIFE-CYCLE**.

This is the period of *Contraction*. In the remaining years of life there is a progressive withdrawal of energy from our bodies and senses, but not from the mind. We note that it still continues to function at full capacity. In fact, with less interference now from the body and senses, the mind's function can become greatly enhanced in this phase.

If we can see this, then the downward curve can be accepted graciously, and we can live in accordance with nature's plan. However, those who live at the body and sense level are bound to mistakenly see this phase as unfavourable, as full of hardships, as an impediment to development. They reject Nature's plan and move further away from Truth.

From Grihastha to Vanaprastha Life

The transition from Grihastha to Vanaprastha is the crest of a *vertical* bend in life. We are at the end of the Upward Curve and the beginning of the Downward Curve. From the crest we can see both sides – the material behind us and the spiritual ahead of us.

A *horizontal* bend also looms up ahead of us. We change in direction from a predominantly secular life to one that is more spiritual. Due to these two bends, we have to adjust our 'speed', raise the foot from the accelerator and gently apply the brakes.

Checklist: Here is a comprehensive checklist of what needs to be done:

i) Start handing over responsibilities to others.
ii) Make arrangements for the children to be well-settled in life.
iii) Do more charity and thereby place a limit to our desires.
iv) Permit others the freedom to lead their lives according to their wishes.
v) Do not interfere in the affairs of the children, but be ready to help them.
vi) Spend more time in silence – in contemplation and meditation.
vii) Spend more time in sedate activities – reading good, inspiring books.
viii) Become more serious in "Seeking the Self within".

Many more points may be added, but the trend can be seen clearly. We will go into the details in the next two talks. Now it's time to conclude with a story on the Life-Cycle:

The Boy & the Apple Tree

A long time ago, there was a huge apple tree. A little boy loved to come and play around it everyday. He climbed to the treetop, ate the apples, took a nap under the shadow…he loved the tree and the tree loved to play with him.

Time went by. The little boy had grown up and he no longer played around the tree every day. One day, the boy came back to the tree and he looked sad. "Come and play with me," the tree asked the boy. The boy replied, "I am no longer a kid, I do not play around trees anymore. I want toys. I need money to buy them." The tree replied, "Sorry, but I do

not have money. But you can pick all *my apples* and sell them. So, you will have money." The boy was very excited. He grabbed all the apples on the tree and left happily. He never came back after he picked the apples. The tree was sad.

One day, the boy who had now turned into a man, returned. The tree was excited and said, "Come and play with me." The man said, "I do not have time to play. I have to work for my family. We need a house for shelter. Can you help me?" The tree helpfully said, "Sorry, but I do not have any house. But you can chop off *my branches* to build your house," So the man cut all the branches of the tree and left happily. The tree was glad to see him happy, but the man never came back since then. The tree was again lonely and sad.

One hot summer day, the man returned and the tree was delighted. "Come and play with me!" the tree exclaimed. The man said, "I am getting too stressed up with life. I want to go sailing to relax myself. Can you give me a boat?" The tree said, "Sorry, but I do not have a boat, but you can use *my trunk* to build your boat. Then you can sail far away and be happy." So the man cut the tree trunk to make his boat. He went sailing and never showed up for a pretty long time.

Finally, the man returned after many years. The tree sadly said, "Sorry, my boy, but I do not have anything for you anymore. No more apples for you…" The man replied, "Oh, I do not have any teeth to bite." The tree went on, "No more branches for you to climb on." The man put in, "Oh, I am too old for that now." The tree now said with tears, "No more trunk for you to rest on – I . . . I really cannot offer you anything. The only thing left is *my dying roots*."

The man looked down sadly and said, "I do not need much now, just a place to rest. I am tired after all these years." "Good!" said the tree, "Old tree roots are the best place to lean on and rest. Come, come sit down with me. Come onto my lap and rest."

The man lay down on the roots and the tree was glad and smiled with tears.

The Tree is "*Our Parents*".

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Verse 2: *PREPARATION FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE* (Steps 9-16)

VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA – 1: Steps 9-10

TIME MANAGEMENT IN RETIREMENT

The Onset of Spiritual Fervour – or "Fever"!

AS FAR AS SADHANA is concerned, entry into Vanaprastha Ashrama heralds the *serious stage of Spirituality*. The lamp of earnest spiritual fervour is lit. If you spell fervour correctly you get 2 marks. If you spell it as "F-e-v-e-r", you deserve to get 10 marks! If spirituality is not the purpose of one's life, the question of Vanaprastha and then Sannyasa Ashrama does not even arise, and one effectively remains in the household stage till death.

The Downward Curve of decay and death of the body cannot be avoided and the only support one can get in this phase is from spirituality. The very purpose of Vanaprastha life as conceived by the ancient Indian sages, is to provide a lifestyle which would nurture spirituality at a time when we are faced with handling the declining powers of the body.

Vanaprastha is a period for great caution and alertness. Spiritual fervour or fever can be extinguished at any moment by an upsurge of deep-rooted Vasanas. Some of you may be itching to say, "Oh, you see what Swamiji is saying - the 'cure' for spiritual fever is Vasanas." No, this is one Fever you want NOT to be cured of! We need *more* spiritual Vasanas.

Householders may tease students in a Gurukula as children. So too, Sannyasis may say to Vanaprasthis, "You are still 'children' on the path". Let them. God does not see children or adults but only souls. Why, even children do not see grown-ups as adults; it is only the self-conscious adults who pride themselves in this way. So let the Sannyasis call Vanaprasthis children – the joke is on them!

Brahmachari are seeking minds, crying for knowledge;
Vanaprasthis are seeking souls, crying for God.

The Purpose of Vanaprastha Ashrama

Vanaprastha is a period for *self-introspection* and *deep self-enquiry*. It is meant to serve as a preparation for the Sannyasa stage that follows. Here is a review of all Ashramas:

	STAGE OF LIFE	STEPS	MAIN FOCUS	PURPOSE OF STAGE
1	**Brahmacharya**	1-4	***Shastras or Vedas***	Acquiring knowledge
2	**Grihastha**	5-8	***Chitta Shuddhi***	Purity of heart
3	**Vanaprastha**	**9-12**	***Chitta Ekagrata***	**One-pointed mind**
4	**Sannyasa**	13 to 24	***Brahma Jnana***	Self knowledge

The whole object of Vanaprastha life is to gain a one-pointed mind. That is the certificate we are aiming for at the culmination of Vanaprastha life.

The Entrance Qualifications for Vanaaprastha Ashrama

Who is the person that is ripe for the Vanaprastha life? Here are 6 qualifications:

i) The person must have successfully concluded his *householder functions*;
ii) He must have done lots of *charity*;
iii) He mst have done lots of *Karma Yoga* to purify himself;
iv) He must have upheld the *Laws of Dharma*;
v) By all these he must have greatly *reduced his Karma*; and, most importantly,
vi) He has now recognised that sense pleasures are carriers of *pain and sorrow*.

The Vanaprastha Sadhana Plan

In Vanaprastha **Steps 9 & 10** deal with Satsang and devotional worship. They concern the external *Time Management* of Vanaprastha Ashrama. The main problem facing Vanaprasthis is how to utilise their time. Steps 9 and 10 aim at providing the right *external environment* for cultivating one-pointedness of mind.

Then **Steps 11 & 12** deal with cultivating Shat-Sampati and giving up all desire-ridden actions. They concern the internal *Mind Management* of Vanaprastha Ashrama. One-pointedness is all about the mind. Steps 11 and 12 are aimed at providing the right *internal environment* for cultivating one-pointedness of mind.

This is the plan of action. Today we shall cover Steps 9 and 10 only.

Step 9: संगः सत्सु विधीयतां *Sangah sat suvidheeyataam*

Seek companionship with men of wisdom.

Family Relationships:

Let us begin by looking at family relationships and how they need to be adjusted. We, the Vanaprasthis, have had our turn to be in charge of the family. Now another role has to be fulfilled. Our contribution to the family can become more spiritual and less physical. Being the guiding parents or the story-telling grandparents can be the new role.

The children have their own life programme and need freedom to pursue it, without any interference from us. One should empower the children fully and not interfere thereafter. This is the recipe for good family relations. If we encroach upon their lives, needless disharmony can arise. That is why In the old days, Vanaprasthis literally went away into the forest to live in solitude to avoid such problems from arising.

Worldly contacts, whether family or others, always drag us to worldly levels. Unholy company is disastrous. The Vasana seeds simply wait in a dormant state for the first rains of bad company to come, and then they sprout up again!

Only the company of the wise and experienced can assist us to find ways and means of coping with our spiritual interests.

Association With the Wise

The most urgent need – an absolute must, in fact – is for us to seek holy company or Satsang, to protect the young plant of *Aspiration* in our heart. We have to take care to nurture its growth. By whatever means, the onus rests with us to find good company. Good company is very "infectious" – some goodness is bound to rub off onto us.

However, the *most infectious* good company is the Goodness in ourselves! It can infect everything that hits us from outside, even those who may wish to harm us.

We remember the story of Duryodhana and Yudhisthira by Sri Swami Sivananda. Duryodhana could not find a single good person and Yudhisthira could not find a single bad person! This was due to their own minds. Good can see only good everywhere.

Pujya Swami Vimalanandaji related a nice anecdote. He said two Sannyasis met in the Ashram. One of them said to the other, "Look, I am going to tell you a great secret. In this world, there are only two good persons – ***you*** and ***me***! Please don't tell this to anyone."

In the sports page there appeared an article: The world's best two goalkeepers, Buffon and Cassilas, tweeted to each other: Cassilas said, "How does it feel to be the number one goalkeeper in the world?" Buffon tweeted back, "I don't choose. We (i.e. both of us) are the best in the world!"

Step 10: भगवतो भक्तिर्दृढाऽऽधीयतां; ***Bhagavatah bhaktih dridhaa aadheeyataam***

Be established in firm devotion to the Lord.

Usually we "love" those who give us happiness. That is the condition attached to ordinary, conditional love. Supreme Love is that which is "unconditional". It is love for love's sake. Supreme Love is the nature of *Bhakti*.

A conviction that all living beings are forms of God encourages us to have unconditional love for all people as well as animals and birds. It redefines God.

Karma Yoga is the predecessor of Bhakti Yoga – service and devotion go hand in hand. They are like our hands and legs which have to work together. In Brahmacharya Ashrama, we learnt the art of doing Karma Yoga (Step 3) by dedicating all our actions at the altar of the Lord. Now, some 30-50 years later, we reap the fruit of Karma Yoga which is Bhakti or devotion.

The Eleven Types of Devotional Practices

Devotional practices known as Upasanas help us immensely in developing Chitta Ekagrata or focussing our mind on God alone. The *Narada Bhakti Sutras* give the following eleven attitudes one can have towards the Lord; they are also in a graded sequence:

1. ***Kirtan**: Love for glorifying His qualities; (Saguna Bhakti)*
2. ***Roopa**: Love for His divine Form; (Saakaara Bhakti)*
3. ***Pooja**: Love for worshipping Him;*
4. ***Smarana**: Love for remembering Him;*
5. ***Daasya**: Love for doing service for Him;*
6. ***Sakhya**: Love for friendship in Him;*
7. ***Vaatsalya**: Love for the Lord as one's own child;*
8. ***Kaantaa**: Love as that to a beloved;*
9. ***Atma-Nivedana**: Love for a total self-offering at His feet;*
10. ***Tanmayataa**: Love for complete absorption in Him;*
11. ***Parama Viraha**: Love expressed as pangs of separation from Him;*

These are the "eleven lanes of the Highway of Bhakti", which is appropriate because they are all parallel approaches to God, and no two travellers need keep the same speed.

Selected Reading to Develop Bhakti

In retirement we have plenty of time on our hands. One useful activity would be to spend a lot of it on *reading* good devotional literature to develop Bhakti.

1*. The Puranas*: These contain stories of the glories of the Lord. They are very simple to follow and do not require any detailed knowledge of the scriptures. It is suitable for all.

2*. Srimad Bhagavatam*: This is one of the Puranas. It is a book that can absorb one's attention for years together. The stories of the ten Avataras are told. We also have detailed passages on the pastimes of Lord Krishna in His childhood and youth. Through the medium of stories, Vedantic philosophy also is passed on to the reader.

3*. Ramayana & Mahabharata*: These are two epics that would never fail to inspire us on the spiritual path. Vanaprasthis would find them extremely useful. They contain some of the most inspiring of devotional literature in the world.

4*. Yoga Vasishtha & Skanda Purana*: These are for the more serious students.

5*. Narada Bhakti Sutras, Hanuman Chalisa & Mukunda Mala*: By making efforts to study these great works of great devotees of God, we get the needed inspiration to raise our Bhakti higher and higher.

CONCLUSION: Virtue Enhances Bhakti

It is not easy to establish oneself in devotion to the Lord. Not the least obstacle will be our own weaknesses and acquired past habits.

Cultivating devotion really means *cultivating more virtues*. We grow in devotion in proportion to the virtuous qualities that we develop. God is the possessor of all virtues.

Next week we will take a more detailed look at Virtues, in particular the specific Virtues that prepare us for Vedantic Sadhana. The next two steps are the internal Sadhanas for Vanaprastha, dealing with the *Mind*.

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VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 2: Steps 11-12

MIND MANAGEMENT IN RETIREMENT

WE CONCLUDE Vanaprastha Ashrama tonight. Just to recap a little from the last talk, you will recall that the entrance qualification for Vanaprastha Ashrama was quite high. We entered Vanaprastha with the recognition that all pleasures are riddled with Pain. Today you will see that when we leave Vanaprastha it is after having gained something very substantial from it. We leave Vanaprastha with *Chitta Ekagrata*, a one-pointed mind.

You may recall Sri Shankaracharyaji's pattern. We have seen it in the two previous Ashramas, and we see it again now: four steps in each Ashrama, two dealing with external or secular matters and two with internal or spiritual matters. All of them are about Sadhana.

Step 11:	शान्त्यादिः परिचीयतां	***Shaanti aadih paricheeyataam***
	Cultivate the virtues called Shat Sampati.	

Shaantyaadih: This means "*Shaanti, etc*." Shanti is the first of the Sixfold Virtues known in Vedanta as **Shat Sampati.** Another terms for Shanti is Shama. The six virtues are:

i) ***Shamah:*** internal control – of the mind;
ii) ***Damah:*** external control – of the senses;
iii) ***Uparamah:*** mastery of the mind, no longer its slaves;
iv) ***Shraddhaa:*** faith in God; trust in someone who guides or teaches;
v) ***Titikshaa:*** the power of endurance and forbearance;
vi) ***Samaadhaanam:*** one-pointedness of mind, the culmination of all the virtues.

This entire set is the third item of Sadhana Chatushtaya, which is made up of Viveka, Vairagya, Shat Sampati and Mumukshutva. This is the prequalification for Jnana Yoga.

The Roti-Making Machine

One can think of these six as separate virtues. Even better, is to see them as acting together as a machine to produce one end result, a *one-pointed mind*. Here is a simile which deserves some thought – a *Roti-Making Machine*!

The machine has one aim only – to produce rotis at the discharge end. Similarly, Shat Sampati has only one aim – to produce a one-pointed mind.

The machine has several inputs from the start all along the way, ending in the completed product called the Roti. The first input is wheat *Flour*. This represents **SHAMA**, the attempt to control the Mind. Flour can be blown away by the slightest wind. The thoughts in the mind, too, can be blown away by the slightest desire and get scattered onto the objects of the senses.

To prevent this scattering, *Water* is needed. Water represents **DAMA** or control of the senses. The water holds the thoughts together and keeps them from being scattered. The senses are instructed to say 'No' to every wrong impulse of the mind. Of course, it is a temporary suppression of the thoughts. But it serves a useful purpose in an emergency.

The two are mixed together in a large pot with stirrers. The mixing action produces the *Dough* of the required consistency. The dough represents **UPARAMA** or mastery over the mind. Now there is no need for suppression. The mind has become strong and sturdy and can resist all attempts to run towards the sense objects. The Dough is a well-controlled mind, a mind which is obedient to the intellect and stops having its own stubborn ways.

The Dough is a new product all its own, but it is not yet Roti. It needs to undergo the kneading process of trials and tribulations. It is cut up into balls. The balls go through the process of *beating, flattening and rolling* into the shape of rotis. All this represents the test of **SHRADDHA** or Faith.

The flattened roti is also a new product but it is raw. It needs to be placed on a hot plate and get baked. The rotis go through the *firing process* of **TITIKSHA** or Endurance. They get turned over twice so that they may rise after the second turning.

Finally, the *Roti* is ready. It represents **SAMAADHAANA**, or the one-pointed mind.

How does one get rewarded for all this? An injector at the end of the conveyor sprays some hot ghee over one side of the roti before discharging onto a stack. For the Sadhaka the Gods send down a shower of flowers upon such a well-baked Sadhaka!

The Practical Purpose of Shat Sampati

You may recall in Brahmacharya Ashrama we had the two spiritual steps which represented Attach and Detach. Well, here the first three virtues, *Shama-Dama-Uparama*, represent DETACHMENT of the mind from the world. The next three virtues, *Titiksha-Shraddha-Samadhana*, represent ATTACHMENT of the mind to the Lord. Together, all six virtues are pulling us away from the world and pushing us towards God!

Step 12: दृढतरं कर्माशु सन्त्यज्यताम् । ***Dridhataram karmaashu santyajyataam***

Eschew all desire-ridden actions.

The Emphasis on Renunciation in Indian Religions

In Brahmacharya Ashrama we said, "*Renounce all desires in the mind*." In the Grihastha Ashrama we said, "Escape from the prison of Home". Now in Vanaprastha Ashrama we hear, "Renounce all desire-ridden actions." We are talking of renouncing the last traces of worldly desire so that our whole mind can be offered to the Lord.

What we notice is the great emphasis on **RENUNCIATION** from the very early years of life. Renunciation is indeed the pillar of a righteous, God-oriented life. This is the view of religion in India. It is India's gift to mankind that renunciation has remained a recognised step in the practice of religion. The degree of renunciation keeps climbing. And from the next talk onwards, when we deal with Sannyasa Ashrama, renunciation is taken to its highest level.

The Culmination of Vanaprastha

Saintly company and Devotional practices (the externals) go hand in hand with Virtues and Renunciation (the internals); they complement each other. The one supports the other. If we experience difficulties in the externals, it is as if God is saying to us, "Come on, speed up, cultivate the internals quickly, time is running out!" And the reverse is equally true if we are not moving quickly enough in the inner control of the mind.



Flour = ***Shama***



Water = ***Dama***   Mixing = Practice of ***Uparama*** (Mind Control)



Dough = ***Uparama*** (Mastery over Mind)



Rolling the Dough = Test of ***Shraddha*** (Faith)



Shaping the Roti = ***Titiksha*** (Moulding)



Baking & Turning = ***Titiksha*** (Enduring Pain)



The Roti = ***Samaadhaana*** (Focused Mind)

THE ROTI-MAKING SIMILE APPLIED TO SHAT SAMPATI

Shama	The Wheat *Flour*
Dama	Adding the *Water*
Uparama	Forming the *Dough*
Shraddha	The *Rolling* & *Shaping* of Roti
Titiksha	The *Firing* Process
Samaadhaana	The *Cooked Roti*
The Certificate	The *Ghee*!

Simile for VANAPRASTHA ASHRAMA

Friends, Vanaprastha Ashrama demands a higher commitment to spiritual life than that expected in the earlier Ashramas. It requires us to make some radical changes in our life. When the seeker is ready, God takes the responsibility to see that everything is arranged for him to make the transition into Sannyasa Ashrama. With the successful preparation in Vanaprastha, we are ready to make the big leap into Sannyasa Ashrama.

CONCLUSION: Words of FAITH

I would like to close by reading to you these beautiful words which teach us what it means to have faith in the Guru, faith in the scriptures, and faith in God:

Towards the Guru: "O Guru, I trust your nobility; I see your nobility; I see your utter selflessness, the compassion with which you share your knowledge. I am eternally indebted to you, and forever I shall serve you. I do not know whether I deserve this or not – I don't know…probably I don't, but still, somehow, in your heart has come compassion for me. I know not why. I am eternally grateful to you, my Guru. I know that you will take me to the Supreme Truth. Please do use me forever."

***Towards the Scriptures*:** "O Mother Sruti! How many people you have liberated by your blessed words! By your pure wisdom, how many saints have crossed the ocean of Samsara! As my Guru remains yours, won't you help me? Aren't you my Mother? You protect those who follow you. Help me follow you implicitly. There are many things what you say that I don't understand, but I know that a mother cooks food and gives it to her child, and the child takes that food without a doubt, feeling, "Yes, what my mother has given is good for me." In the same way, let me take your words, relish them in my heart, live my life according to your dictates, and let me be blessed like how the saints of yore have been blessed."

***Towards Ishwara* or God:** "O Lord, the Master of the whole Universe! O Lord, the Governor of the whole Cosmos, whom I do not see, but who in every instant of my life comes forward and guides me, helps me and takes me forward. Lord, forever clear my path that I may walk in peace. Show me my way. Give me faith in my Guru, and give me faith in the Shastras, for it is you who gives faith. Make my heart pure, so that I may receive the knowledge that my Guru gives. Adorn me with Sadhana Chatushtaya. Please ensure that my Guru forgives my trespasses."

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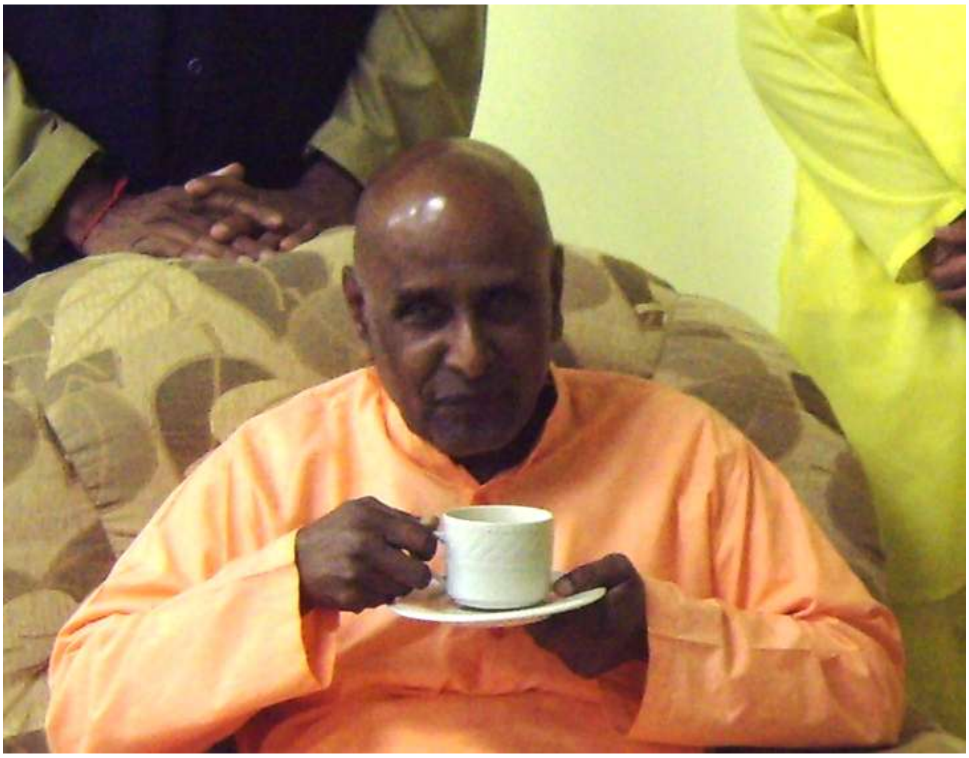




Pujya Swami Chidanandaji Maharaj



Pujya Swami Vimalanandaji Maharaj



Pujya Swami Padmanabhanandaji Maharaj



Guruji, Pujya Swami Tejomayanandaji Maharaj

4. SANNYASA ASHRAMA
OVERVIEW OF THE LIFE OF RENUNCIATION

WE NOW COME TO the Sadhana of the **Jnana Kanda**, known in this series as ***Sannyasa Ashrama Sadhana***. After having completed Brahmacharya, Grihastha and Vanaprastha Ashramas, we come to Sannyasa Ashrama. The Sadhana in this phase forms the crowning glory of Indian spirituality. It is why thousands of spiritual seekers go on coming year after year to the shores of India as calves go again and again to their mothers for nourishing milk.

A Word to Those Who Do Not Qualify

Now a word to our general audience. One does not have to be ready for the Sannyasa stage to benefit from listening to this series of talks. The knowledge we shall discuss here onwards is valuable for *all* seekers, even to those who are not yet ready for the actual Sadhana. A theoretical understanding is always a great help on the spiritual path:

i) If we know what lies ahead of us on this most challenging of ventures, it will inspire us to press on with more determination.

ii) We will know what is within our capacity and what is beyond it. We will not foolishly try to do Sadhanas for which we are not ready, and become needlessly dejected.

iii) We will develop patience to become *pakka* in our present stage of Sadhana.

iv) We will develop a self-evaluation skill. We will not fool ourselves, nor be fooled by others regarding the milestones of genuine spiritual progress.

v) This assessment skill will enable us to differentiate genuine spirituality from fraudulent spirituality, the genuine from the humbug. Gurudev was a Master of this art.

For these reasons, the talks from here onward will certainly be helpful to all aspirants, even though not all may be in a position to practice them now. It is knowledge worth knowing, since one day all of us will certainly be ready for it.

The Essential Qualification for Sannyasa Sadhana

Firstly, let us see who is the person we are talking of. What has he done to qualify or arrive at this stage?

i) Taking purely the stages of life into account, we can say that what he has done is he has arrived at the right *age* for it, over 70. His main qualification is his age. It is not a cheap entry point. Age in India is highly respected. Age is equated to wisdom. Satisfactory experience of the three previous stages entitles him to this phase of Sadhana.

ii) Or, there is the rare soul who is born with very *good spiritual Samskaras*, These surface at an early age. Due to a natural Sattwic temperament, he leads a good, clean, well-disciplined life, and decides to bypass Grihastha Ashrama. Chitta Shuddhi and Chitta Ekagrata are already there. The colour of the cloth he wears is immaterial in his case.

iii) Or, more commonly, whatever his early life was like, due to favourable upbringing an interest comes early for spiritual matters. Taking the formal route, he joins an Ashram

where he spends at least 12 years or so as a ***Brahmachari*** (in yellow or white cloth), and seriously practices the first 12 Steps of Sadhana Panchakam under guidance.

iv) Or, in addition to the above route he decides, in consultation with his Guru, to take the formal *Sannyasa vows* (the ochre cloth) and becomes a full-time Karma Sannyasi.

These are the four access points for the Sadhana from Step 13 to 24. In all four cases, the Sadhaka clearly understands that *true renunciation* is the basic requirement and that it entails giving up of one's **Ego** and one's pleasure-serving **Desire**. Individuality has to make way for universality, and the intellect comes to the fore to check Desire. These are the two essential qualifications needed for this phase of spiritual Sadhana.

In this talk we will take a bird's eye view of the Sadhana of Sannyasa Ashrama, listed as Steps 13 to 24 by Sri Shankaracharyaji in Sadhana Panchakam.

The Importance of Renunciation

Sannyasa means renunciation. When the thing we wish to tackle is difficult, we need to give up many other things in order to do that. *Giving up something low for a higher goal*, is the purest way of defining Renunciation. We give up everything that holds us back from moving Godward. Renunciation is proof of how intensely we really long for God.

When the seeker is ready, God takes the responsibility to see that everything is arranged for him to make the transition into Sannyasa Ashrama smooth.

> ***Renunciation is not something that is demanded by any external agency such as social convention or custom. When the seeker is at this stage, he is impelled from within to make the needed adjustments in the outer details of life. This adjustment mainly involves renunciation.***

Renunciation is the prime criterion to enter the Jnana Kanda stage of Sadhana. In the Geeta, the minimum renunciation to start with is the renunciation of the *fruits* of one's actions. Thereafter, the renunciation intensifies as we progress further.

The Road Ahead

All of you must have gone on holidays at some time. Did you not spend hours and hours going through maps and travel brochures to plan your holiday? Of course you did. Some with an adventurous spirit may argue they can still go on holiday without all that planning. Be it so – perhaps they may enjoy it all the more! For the sake of these talks, we assume that some amount of planning is purposeful, necessary and rewarding.

Let us therefore spend some useful time on looking at the map ahead of us. In this Overview of Sannyasa Ashrama the purpose is to indicate what we are in for in the next six talks. We are taking a structured approach to spiritual life. This is the very purpose of these talks – to know the Rationale of Sadhana, to know where we are going.

The Diagram below shows us the Road Map ahead. We are in the Jnana Kanda.

Column 1: The DESIRE Scale

In this column we see the desire reducing from 100% to 0%. Desire is the measure of the impurity in the mind. As desires reduce, Chitta Shuddhi or Purity increases. All the stages of Sadhana are related to the level of one's purity. Purity has a very close bearing on what Sadhana will suit us. This shows the dynamic nature of Sadhana, which we discuss later.

THE MILESTONES OF GROWTH

(from the Bhagavad Geeta)

DESIRE SCALE (a rough idea)	MAJOR DIVISIONS	PHASES & MILESTONES	SADHANA PANCHAKAM REF. & STEPS
0%	JNANA KANDA	PHASE V **JIVANMUKTI** Illumination	Steps 33-40 **NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI** Full Abidance in Self
		5. Sthitaprajna: ***Attain Steady Wisdom*** *– Zero Vasanas*	
		PHASE IV **DHYANA YOGA** Meditation	Steps 21-24 **NIDIDHYASANA** Intermittant Abidance in Self
10		**4. Yoga-Roodhah:** ***Complete Mounting**** *– Quietude, Zero doubts*	
		PHASE III **JNANA YOGA** Firm Knowledge	Steps 17-20 **MANANA** Reflect & Enquire
20		**3. Yoga-Yuktah:** ***Attain Equipoise*** *– Reduce External Activities*	
		PHASE II **BHAKTI YOGA** Dispassion	Step 15-16 **SRAVANA** Receive Knowledge of Self
40		**2. Aarurukshah:** ***Start Mounting**** *– Begin Om Japa*	
		PHASE I **KARMA YOGA** Burn Out Karmas	Steps 13-14 **GURU UPASADANA** Approach & Serve Guru
60	Jnana Kandi	**1. Saadhaka:** ***Renounce fruits of Actions*** *– Reduce Karmas*	
	UPASANA KANDA	SIXFOLD VIRTUES Devotion & Japa	**VANAPRASTHA** 9-12 **GRIHASTHA** 5-8
80	Upaasaka	**Grihasthi & Vanaprasthi:** *Increase Chitta Shuddhi, Chitta Ekagrata*	
	KARMA KANDA	Start Reducing Desire Perfection in Work Secular Studies	Steps 1-4 **BRAHMACHARYA**
100	Karma Kandi	**Brahmachari in Gurukula:** *Follow Dharma (Righteous Conduct)*	

*Mounting = Climbing the "Steed" of Knowledge

Col. 1. The <u>*Desire Scale*</u> is a rough guide to the level of Purity that determines what Sadhana is done.

Col. 2. Prior to the <u>*Jnana Kanda*</u>, the student may go through the Karma Kanda and Upasana Kanda stages, but the latter are not necessary pre-conditions for the former.

Col. 3. Jnana Yoga is the 3rd phase of Jnana Kanda Sadhana. It is also called <u>*Karma Sannyasa Yoga*</u> in the Geeta. One can take Sannyasa on reaching this phase. This is the heart of Jnana Kanda.

Col. 4. The Steps of Sadhana as given in <u>*Sadhana Panchakam*</u>. Steps 25-32 (verse 4) applies to all.

Column 2: Major Divisions of the Vedas

Jnana means "knowledge". In earlier stages, too, we need Jnana suited to those stages. That knowledge is found in the *Karma Kanda* and *Upasana Kanda* of the Vedas. In the Sannyasa Ashrama stage we need to acquire certain **specific knowledge** of the Self which is to be found in the *Jnana Kanda* of the Vedas, i.e. the Upanishads.

This is knowledge that deals with the nature of the Self or Brahman. In particular it is knowledge which tells us that the Jiva and Brahman are identical. That is the heart of the teaching in the Jnana Kanda. In the case of Swami Sivananda, it was a book called Jiva Brahma Aikya which turned his life around and led him to renounce the world. The adjustment Gurudev made was to move from Malaya and come to Himalaya!

Column 3: Important Milestones & Phases in Sadhana

According to the Geeta, Jnana Kanda Sadhana has 5 Phases and 5 Milestones. It starts with Karma Yoga and progresses on to Dhyana Yoga.

1st : Karma Yoga: *Tyaagi*, one begins by renouncing the fruits of action.

2nd : Bhakti Yoga: *Aarurukshah*, one starts mounting the "steed" of Jnana.

3rd : Jnana Yoga: *Yoga Yuktah*, one gains equipoise and balance of mind; at this point external activities may be reduced; one can take up Sannyasa, if approved by the Guru.

4th : Dhyana Yoga: *Yogaaroodhah*, one completes mounting the "steed" of Jnana; the mind becomes calm and ready for the practice of intense meditation.

5th : Jivanmukti: *Stithaprajna*, one attains the state of a sage of steady wisdom.

Column 4: Reference to Sadhana Panchakam Steps

In this column all the Steps of Sadhana Panchakam are listed and their relevant stage names are given. Steps 25-32 (Verse 4) are appropriate throughout one's Sadhana.

CONCLUSION: The Dynamic Nature of Sadhana

The dynamic nature of Sadhana needs to be highlighted here. One sees the need for flexibility in one's Sadhana, the need to be very practical about it, to always keep in mind why we are doing certain Sadhanas, and to know when to discontinue certain practices in order to take up others that are more appropriate to the higher stage. One should not stagnate in Sadhana, even as one does not remain in the same class at school every year.

Suppose one is engaged in doing some regular Pooja. It may be necessary to give up this Pooja when it has served its purpose. But to give up something like Pooja may be very hard, since the person becomes attached to doing such a "good" practice. "I can give up anything but my Pooja", he says. If he has proper discrimination, he will understand that he is only continuing his "Pooja" in another form. Sadhana is *dynamic*. It varies according to our spiritual need at the time. This is not easy for one to recognize in oneself.

This is what *Rationale in Sadhana* is really all about.

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SANNYASA ASHRAMA – 1: Steps 13-14

MEETING ONE'S GURU

WE HAVE SEEN IN the Overview of Sannyasa Ashrama last week that we have come to a distinctly new phase of Sadhana called the Jnana Kanda Sadhana.

Distinctiveness of Jnana Kanda Sadhana

A simile would be of great help to understand the distinction . . .

i) Suppose I am struggling for my life in the mid-stream of a *river*. That would resemble us who are struggling in the mid-stream of **Samsara**.

ii) What I need is a *long rope* so that I can get hold of one end and my rescuer can slowly haul me towards the bank. In **Steps 1-12** of *Sadhana Panchakam* Sri Shankaracharyaji has thrown us a "rope" to rescue us safely to the bank so that we can come out of the water of worldliness. This is the **Bahiranga Sadhana** or external, preliminary phase of Sadhana.

iii) For someone on the river bank wanting to save me, to throw me a *towel* to dry myself would not help me a bit; it will actually be a great nuisance to me. Similarly, it does not help me to do Jnana Kanda Sadhana while I am still in the water. Only when I come out of the water of Samsara, am I ready for the "towel", with which I can dry myself, and then begin the **Antaranga Sadhana**, the internal, advanced phase of Jnana Kanda Sadhana.

This is the distinctive change that takes place in our Sadhana from this point onwards. With that important understanding, we are ready to proceed further:

Step 13:	सद्विद्वानुपसृप्यतां	***Sadvidvaan upasripyataam***
	Take shelter in a perfect Master (Guru).	

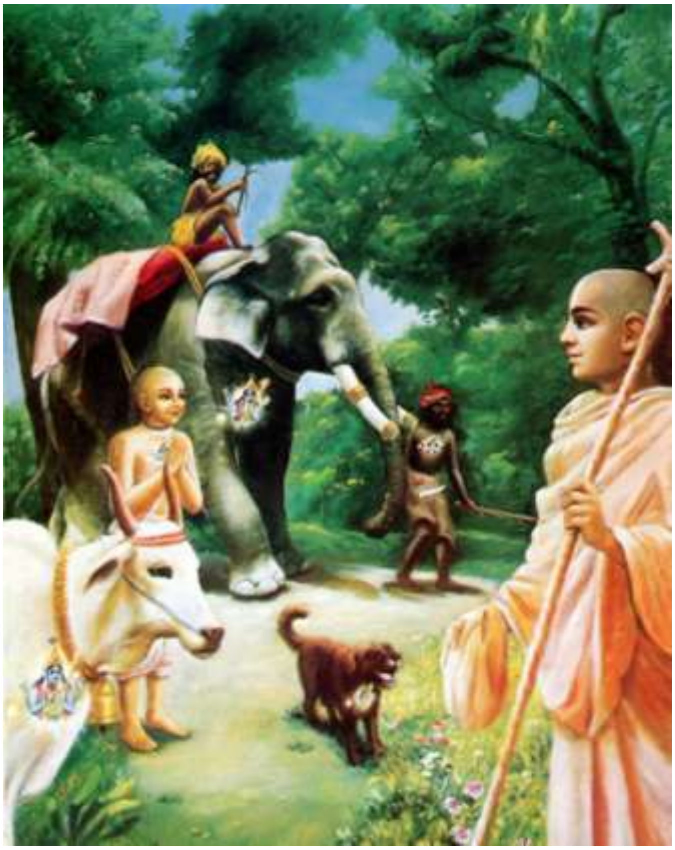
In the very first Step, our Divine Rescuer hands us a "towel", and it comes to us in *human form!* If we succeed in using the rope to draw ourselves to the bank and come out of the water of worldliness, our due reward comes to us as the **GURU**! The Guru is the *customised version* of God for our own unique need.

On Finding the Guru

To know whom NOT to take as Guru, advertise for him in the newspaper! You will have a long queue outside your home. Even your dog will get fed up wagging its tail, and will soon start barking to drive them away!

We need not go hunting for a Guru. Our sincere seeking itself attracts him to us. Gurudev says, "He in whose presence we feel inspired, elevated and peaceful, is our Guru."

> ***Vedanta sees it as God's responsibility to lead one to his Guru. God arranges everything to make it happen. After all, it is God that comes in this human form, the "customised form" of God!***



The Guru & Disciple
A Sacred Spiritual Relationship

The Vedantic Concept of a Guru's Function

The Guru's task is to create the right conditions for our transformation; his glory lies in making us realise the unreality of our ego and identify ourselves with the Reality. This is his *sole function*.

To function as a Guru one should firstly be ***Brahmanishtha***, i.e. firmly established in the Self. To be illumined or realized is a *sufficient condition* to function as a Guru.

Secondly, one should also be ***Shrotriya***, i.e. able to communicate and teach the scriptures to others. To be able to teach well is a *necessary condition* to function as a Guru.

Teaching is a talent on its own. It requires great love for the student, understanding of his level, deep care and concern for his evolution, and some knowledge of teaching skills.

However, strange concepts go around today, especially among Guru hunters. A Guru is seen as one who topples one's pride and arrogance, and the harsher he is at that task, the greater he is considered to be! Ego-bashing is not the Guru's function – that even the world can do, and it does it quite well! It does not need the pure Guru to do that. It is incorrect to think that that is the Guru's function.

Example of a Doctor in a Hospital: Let us take the case of a doctor employed in a large hospital. He can take the blood tests and the sugar tests, but he does not. He can bring the patient's food daily, but he does not. He can move the patient from the ward to the theatre, but he does not. Other hospital staff are trained and paid to do such work.

It pays the hospital to instruct the doctor to stick to his _essential function_ – to do the actual surgery in the theatre, to prescribe the treatment, and check the patient's progress.

It is the same with the Guru; his task is something far more important, deep and beneficial. He does what he is best at – *remove the patient's **Avidya** or ignorance*. Therein lies the supreme value of the Guru. Of such a Guru it is said "Guru is God".

Example of How a Guru Works: There is the case of Swami Tapovanji, a friend and contemporary of Gurudev Sivananda. To him came a lady with flowers in her hand. She did this every day. One day Swami Tapovanji looked straight into her and said, "Drop it!" The bewildered lady dropped the bunch of flowers. Swamiji calmly repeated, "Drop it!" She could not understand. Then Swamiji compassionately explained to her. "The first time, I asked you to drop the Ego which brought the flowers. The second time, I asked you to drop the same Ego which made you feel hurt about it."

What does this tell us? It tells us the Guru is not a trickster, not a magician, not a miracle man – but he is _all compassionate and lovingly caring_ for our highest welfare.

Step 14: प्रतिदिनं तत्पादुका सेव्यतां; ***Pratidinam tat paadukaa sevyataam***
Everyday, serve the Guru's sacred sandals.

Endearing Oneself to the Guru

External forms of devotion may certainly help in the beginning to build up devotion to the Guru. However, it is dedicated and long service of the Guru that truly endears us to the Guru. This is what is meant by ***Tat Paduka Sevyataam***, "*serving his Holy Sandals*".

The Indian ideal is not just serving the Feet but the _sandals_. The sandals are already serving the Guru's feet. The ideal we have to try to cultivate is to be the "servant of the servant of the feet that hold up the Guru!" This calls for great humility and sacrifice.

Even if we serve his feet directly, sacrifice is needed. Sandals are known to do all the _dirty work_. Yet, they go on serving the Master unnoticed. When entering a home, they are left outside, invariably not neatly. They uncomplainingly face the bad weather, the rain and the mud. We are required to be *their* servants, that is, lower than the low.

Example of Bharata: Bharata refused to accept the throne of Ayodhya when Rama, his elder brother, was exiled to the forest. Rama appealed to him that he had to do this duty. As a compromise, Bharata took Rama's sandals, placed them on his head and walked back to Ayodhya, where he placed them on the throne and ruled the state as a servant of the Lord. He even shifted his residence to Nandigram, lower than Ayodhya, where he built his home below the ground – he had to be in a *lower position* than Rama!

Guru-Seva Needs Humility:

Indeed, the highest humility is needed to do Guru-Seva. Service of the Guru has the designed effect – it naturally reduces the ego at every stage. Every act of service gives us the opportunity to eradicate a chunk of our ego-sense. The Guru's service is incomparable in the efficiency with which the disciple's Ego is chipped off.

When looked at in this manner, who is serving who? Isn't the Guru really serving the disciple? He is lifting the disciple up from the ditch, as it were.

Effacement of the ego happens on its own when the disciple puts his whole mind on pleasing his Guru by his service. The disciple serves with no thought of his own comfort. That is the significance of his shaven head. The Brahmachari's mundan ceremony and the Sannyasi's shaven head carry this meaning. It is no mean achievement. In spiritual life it is the most central of all processes to bring about accelerated growth in the aspirant.

Example given by Swami Sivananda: Gurudev humourously remarks of disciples who approach their Guru with one hand in their pocket, and a cigarette in the other! He writes of the disciple who kept finding excuses not to do the tasks given to him by his Guru, until one day the Guru asked him to help himself to some sweetmeats. Then the disciple said, "Oh, Guruji, how much longer can I disobey you? I will obey you now at once." And he polished off all the sweetmeats!

Points to Ponder in Guru-Seva

1. God has some *choice forms* through which He expresses Himself. Mother and father are two of those forms. A good friend is a third. The Guru is the purest form of God that we can ever hope to see. He is mother, father, friend and guide all rolled into one.

2. The service of the Guru is for *our benefit*; it is not that the Guru needs this service. The service must not be forced onto the Guru. If he is not in need, please leave him alone. It is not required to be aggressive in personal service to the Guru.

3. In the matter of *giving presents* to the Guru, it is worth remembering that once it is given, it is his, not ours anymore. It is not our concern what he does with it. The Guru may give it away to some other person, needy or not, and we should not feel disappointed.

4. It is said, "*Obedience is better than Reverence*." Total unconditional love and sincerity is needed in our approach to and service of the Guru. We should always know where to draw the line in our freedom to talk to him and be close to him.

5. Where does this service of the Guru lead us to? The answer is To greater and greater inner purity of mind. Once a disciple said, "I have been duped by my Guru. I am getting nowhere." The wise listener responded with the remark, "Your desire for God must also have been a dupe."

In the Steps that follow, we shall see the true purpose of the Guru, and begin to understand why he is said to be indispensable. There are yet more peaks he is wanting us to climb in the next 10 Steps, which we shall cover two at a time in each talk.

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SANNYASA ASHRAMA – 3: Steps 15-16

THE GURU STARTS HIS TEACHING

The Guru Makes His Assessment

DURING THE PERIOD of personal service to the Guru and his mission, a close *interaction and bonding* takes place between Guru and disciple. They get to know each other. The Guru gets a good opportunity of getting to know the nature of his student, and the student gets more and more attuned to the requirements of the Guru.

Theory goes hand in hand with practice. For the two steps we deal with today, Steps 15-16, the first is the practice and the second is the theory; this is one case where the practice *precedes* the theory, and we will soon see why it has to be so.

Step 15: ब्रह्मैकाक्षरमर्थ्यतां ***Brahma eka aksharam arthyataam***

Worship the Supreme, Immutable One.

At the right time, when the Guru feels that the disciple is *ripe*, i.e. he has attained the required Chitta Shuddhi and Chitta Ekagrata, the latter is asked to adjust his method of worshipping God in the following way. The disciple is required to shift from **Saakaara-Saguna**, i.e. worship of God with form and attributes, to **Niraakaara-Nirguna**, i.e. worship of the formless and attributeless God. The idea is to shift from the grosser to the subtler, from the body to the mind. The disciple gets trained gradually to go more within himself. He does so through the following five stages:

TRANSITION FROM FORM TO FORMLESS

i) ***Traditional Puja***: This consists in making offerings of ghee, ringing bells and playing instruments, observing the form of the Lord's *murti*, reciting prayers, etc. These together require the use of the *hands, eyes, ears and the mind*. This is the first stage of worship.

ii) ***Omitting the Hands***: Retaining all items except the Havan and the instruments, the hands become quite free. Only the *eyes, ears and mind* are now engaged.

iii) ***Omitting the Eyes***: Then the form also is taken away, while the chanting of the Mantra continues. Now only the *ears and mind* are needed.

iv) ***Omitting the Ears***: The Mantra is replaced by Om, which is first aloud, then whispered and finally chanted mentally. All external distractions are now removed. The Sadhana shifts completely into the *mind*. Even the Om-chanting is dropped by gradually reducing its duration.

v) ***Omitting the Mind***: When this is mastered over a good length of time, the Guru prescribes the highest form of Vedantic worship where there is no prop for the mind to lean on and the mind itself dissolves. The disciple gets completely *absorbed in his inner Self*.

Step 16: श्रुतिशिरो वाक्यं समाकर्ण्यताम् ॥२॥

Shruti shirah vaakyam samaakarnyataam

Listen in depth to the Upanishadic declarations. (This is called Sravana.)

The Guru's higher teaching is contained in the "*Upanishadic declarations*". The highest spiritual knowledge is imparted. Listening to it is given a special term – **SRAVANAM**.

We shall now focus just on this most important step in which knowledge is conveyed by the Guru. The above practice of going within oneself through the chanting of Om is needed to prepare the student for the theoretical knowledge of the nature of that which is deepest within each one of us – the innermost Self. Explanations of the Self can only be meaningful to us when our minds have turned within. That is why we said practice, in this case, comes before theory.

The Subject Studied: Mahavakyas

Vaakyam: These are the Upanishadic declarations, also called *Mahavakyas*. They are highly revered as the Truth itself. Every Upanishad has a Mahavakya around which the teaching is based. The Mahavakya will always be that which pinpoints the Goal of Vedantic Sadhana, namely *Jiva Brahma Aikya*.

For compactness, one Mahavakya is selected from each of the four Vedas. Thus from several hundred Mahavakyas, four main ones are selected. The *Four Mahavakyas* are considered as the quintessence of Vedanta.

For the student, "***Tat Twam Asi***" is the foremost of the Mahavakyas. The disciple is instructed to discover his identity with the Supreme Universal Consciousness. Detailed analyses have been written on the three words that compose it. The Guru takes the disciple through an intricate logical analysis of the statement "Tat Twam Asi".

The following reference texts especially deal with the Mahavakyas:

1. ***Vedanta Sara*** – by Sadananda Yogindra details the analysis of "Tat Twam Asi";
2. ***Vakya Vritti*** – by Sri Adi Shankaracharya also details "Tat Twam Asi";
3. ***Advaita Makaranda*** – by Sri Lakshmidhara Kavi. This is an elaborate Samskrit commentary called which logically explains all the finer principles of Vedanta.
4. ***Panchadashee*** – by Sri Swami Vidyaranya. Book 5 deals with all 4 Mahavakyas.
5. ***Maneesha Panchakam*** – by Sri Adi Shankaracharya also deals with all 4 Mahavakyas.

What is Sravanam?

The first thing to understand about Sravanam is that it is a *very specific knowledge*. We are not talking of listening randomly to a talk here and a talk there as we so often do at functions and Satsangs. It is also not just random spiritual discussion over a cup of tea, nor is it a group discussion where we listen to people airing their views on various matters relating to spiritual life. Such talks and discussions have there place and are by no means being condemned here. But Sravanam is not that; it is something very different.

Sravanam is receiving the Guru's precious teaching as one *body of knowledge*, presented systematically as a complete topic, to be thoroughly grasped with full attention

from A to Z. The disciple is given the full picture of what is involved in the spiritual quest which he is about to embark upon. He is given the necessary theoretical understanding, so that he can then follow it up with further practice of meditation. In Sravanam, he gets to know exactly what is required of him in his inner Sadhana.

Jiva Brahma Aikya – "*The Individual is Identical to Brahman*."

This is the ultimate understanding that the student is expected to arrive at. This understanding can only arise in one who is qualified for Sravanam as described above.

> ***The essential teaching in Sravanam is the identity of one's Self with the universal Self. The Jiva or individual being is really nothing less than the Universal Reality called Brahman. The student thoroughly grasps this knowledge. He can then confidently begin serious meditational practices that will lead him to realise his divine Identity.***

When this understanding takes place, Sravanam is considered done. The student can then proceed further with his Sadhana.

The Procedure Followed in Sravanam

The Guru may or may not follow any formal procedure. He may convey the teaching at a series of formal lectures or he may convey it informally by any other means. He may also choose a bit of both. Why is this so? It is because the knowledge does not come from him personally, but from God Himself. The disciple should be attentive to the message when it comes and listen intently, for the Guru may not repeat them again.

He may select a quiet, peaceful setting or he may convey it in the midst of daily duties. The disciple has to be very attentive and catch the words of the Master whenever and wherever he sees it fit to convey them.

Importance of Full Attention

Sravanam is such an important part of spiritual Sadhana that much preparation is needed just to attune the disciple to listen attentively to the Guru's teaching. He has to give his *whole attention*. The Guru has to assure himself that the disciple's mind is unwavering; that his words are taken to heart; that the seeds of knowledge are being sown on fertile soil and not on barren rock.

> ***Samaakarnyataam:*** this is a strong verb used to indicate the intensity of "listening". The word carries the following components in its meaning:
>
> i) The act of *listening*. This is obvious.
>
> ii) The *attention* given to it by the disciple.
>
> iii) The *concentration* of the intellect to grasp its meaning.
>
> iv) The *intention* or purpose of what is to be done by obtaining such knowledge.
>
> v) The *faith* with which the student receives the knowledge.

When such is the quality of the hearing, the whole being is present at the occasion. It can be likened to a *hearing in a Court-of-Law*. Alertness comes naturally to the student who has been well-prepared for this step.

What Does Sravanam Achieve?

In Samskrit, there is a phrase *Pramaana Gata Sandeha*, which means *"doubts pertaining to the means of knowledge*". When all doubts connected with the Pramana or means of knowledge are removed, Sravana's job is said to have been done.
The highest Pramana used for knowledge of the Self is Shabda Pramana or scriptural authority. Then comes Anumana or reasoning, and then Pratyaksha or sense perception.

The knowledge conveyed during Sravana can be divided into 5 distinct stages. At each stage the primary Pramana will change. The stages are as follows:

1. ***Upasadana*** – (Pratyaksha) the preparatory stage or aligning oneself to the Guru.
2. ***Karana*** – (Anumana) learning about all the causal factors leading to the human birth;
3. ***Jnana*** – (Anumana) knowledge of the five sheaths that make up our constitution;
4. ***Vedanta Tattwa*** – (Shabda) knowledge of the Reality or Supreme Self; and finally
5. ***Mahavakya*** – (Shabda) knowledge dealing with the identity of Jiva with Brahman.

Is Sravanam Sufficient?

This is an interesting question. Under ideal conditions within the disciple, we can say, Yes, Sravanam itself is sufficient to bring one to the state of God-realisation. Examples of such cases are rare but not lacking. A student who is totally ripe for this knowledge, who has all the necessary purity and onepointedness of mind can attain the Truth *immediately* after Sravanam. Sri Shankaracharyaji himself is one such example.

However, in practice there are other doubts that arise besides those concerning the means. Such doubts require further Steps in Sadhana to deal with them. The next four talks will cover these steps.

CONCLUSION: The Necessity of a Guru

Someone asked Guruji, "Why is a Guru necessary? Can't we learn from the text book itself?" The Guru's answer is, "Why don't you ask that question to the book?"

If we are reading a book and don't agree with something it says, we are free to simply close the book and put it aside. We are also free to say, "What nonsense is that!" But if we are in the presence of a Guru, we cannot just walk out of his presence or be rude to him. On the contary, the twinkle in his eyes, the passion in his voice, the radiance on his face, etc, compel our reverence and attentiveness. That is the difference between the two.

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Verse 3: *NURTURING OF SPIRITUAL LIFE* (Steps 17-24)

SANNYASA ASHRAMA - 3: Steps 17-18

MANANA – REFLECTING ON THE KNOWLEDGE

SPIRITUAL SADHANA REACHES its most crucial stage in Verse 3. It requires a rare sincerity which is able to renounce all that the world holds so dear. The one who is utterly devoted to the Lord and the Lord alone, walks this path boldly and fearlessly, and gets the help of the Lord Himself to plod on relentlessly to the very end.

The Heart of the Text

Verse 3 deals with the path of Jnana Yoga proper. Steps 17-20 cover Manana and Steps 21-24 cover Nididhyasana. The process of reflection on the Vedic truths is called **Mananam**. What was heard in Sravanam is reflected upon in Mananam. Today we cover only Steps 17 and 18, which form a pair. The first deals with self-effort and the second deals with surrender. The two go together, hand in hand.

Not only is the verse physically the very centre or heart of *Sadhana Panchakam*, but it also forms the heart of Sannyasa Dharma – that which makes Sannyasa so rare and so honourable, and makes Sannyasins so worthy of respect and reverence. We can have an "armchair peep" into the mind and heart of a true Sannyasin in this verse. It is here that the spiritual path can well be described as "*a razor-edged path*" or "*a journey by the alone to the Alone*".

Of course, the Guru is always there for the seeker, but his presence is felt more *within* than in his outer form. The disciple is now maturing into a fully-fledged aspirant, while always feeling that it is the Guru only who is doing everything through him. *This attitude of humility is crucial in this phase of Sadhana*.

Step 17: वाक्यार्थश्च विचार्यतां श्रुतिशिरः *Vaakyaarthah cha vichaaryataam shrutishirah*
Reflect ever upon the meaning of the Upanishadic commandments.

The "Head" of the Vedas:

The word ***Shirah*** means "*head*". ***Shrutih Shirah*** means "*the Head of the Vedas*". There are three ways of interpreting the 'Head' of the Vedas:

i) ***Structurally:*** they are the *uppermost* portions of the Vedas, as we have already mentioned. Hence, they are the head.

ii) ***Functionally:*** They contain the *most important* doctrines and concepts of the Vedas. A Head Office is where all the most important decisions are taken.

iii) ***Topically:*** All the topics that are discussed in the Vedas have the single purpose of *converging* on the Upanishads. They are all 'heading' towards the Upanishads. Those portions outside the Upanishads are intended to lead people to the Upanishads eventually. This is perhaps the most important reason why they are termed the "Head of the Vedas".

The Place of Intellectual Effort

If spiritual life, being the highest pursuit in life, requires the highest effort, then Mananam is that part of spiritual life that requires the highest *intellectual* effort.

Regarding this effort, the following points help us to see what it entails.

1. *Focus of Thoughts*: A magnifying glass brings to a focal point the sunrays falling on it, so that the rays can actually set a piece of paper alight. Our mind and intellect must also be so focussed that the thought rays get intensified to achieve greater results.

2. *Deep Enquiry*: Our enquiry should always penetrate from the outermost level to the innermost level. It is at the inner core that we start seeing the identity. On the surface level there are many differences.

3. *Correct Means*: The correct means of knowledge must be used to obtain knowledge. This is covered in Sravanam, but has to be kept in mind in Mananam to get more clarity. For example, if we wish to know the time we look at a clock, not in the Vedas.

4. *Unattended Doubts*: An unattended doubt is like having a toothache - it will go on haunting us. We cannot afford to be lacadaisical in this matter, but need to attend to every doubt in a meticulous and thorough manner.

5. *Perfect Preparation*: Wisdom may come in a flash, in an inspired moment, but the preparation for it takes time. Preparation means doing all the Sadhana correctly, in the right sequence and to the point of perfection.

6. *Merciless Manana*: The Manana has to be "merciless", like hunting down terrorists. To allow a single terrorist to slip through our fingers is too many.

The enquiry must be so merciless, that we must be prepared to have our most comforting ideas shattered to pieces. We need an intellect that is fearless and sharp – a scorching searchlight!

7. *Piercing Honesty*: Piercing honesty is required on this path of enquiry. At the end of enquiry, we must be logically convinced of the Truth. If I am not the body, then logically I cannot die. Can I feel this? If I am limitless, can I be indifferent to being called either "an ignorant fool" or "a man of vast knowledge"? Both these belong to a limited state.

However, intellectual effort alone is not sufficient . . . the next step balances effort.

Step 18:	पक्षः समाश्रीयतां	***Pakshah samaashreeyataam***
	Take refuge in the Truth of Brahman.	

The Place of Surrender

Surrender or Faith in the scriptures is the vital element that is added into Mananam by this step. The path necessarily involves a combination of Effort and Surrender.

This Step comes as a *warning sign* for the serious spiritual aspirant: "Do not take the Upanishads lightly. Be serious about your search for God, especially from here onwards."

With our imperfect level of understanding, we are bound to disagree with the scriptures. Nevertheless, we have to "take refuge" in them. We should hold on with faith to the truths declared in the scriptures, and not discard them simply because we do not see eye to eye with them. Then slowly the truth will reveal itself to us.

Some people imagine that the Upanishads are taking us on an ego trip when they say to us "*I am Brahman*". They take this as pampering of the ego, that it is merely playing on our ego to keep us interested and make us feel good about ourselves. We can avoid falling into this pit of contradictions by adhering strictly to the scriptures.

A Working Hypothesis: It helps to have a working hypothesis for every enquiry. The hypothesis for spiritual enquiry is provided in the Upanishads. Hence, it helps if we adhere to them to the letter. As we experience the "first crop" of truths contained in them, our trust builds up, and we are able to grasp more and more of the truth.

We are dealing with a realm beyond material knowledge, beyond the senses, and beyond even the intellect. To correctly understand the Supreme Truth, we have to take refuge in the scriptures. This surrender greatly facilitates our progress.

Combination of Effort & Surrender

Thus we see that Steps 17 and 18 go together. The head and the heart must unite in our quest for the Truth. Both are necessary – deep inner intellectual reflection as well as surrender of the heart to the Divine.

i) *If surrender is absent*, then the effort is likely to become egoistic; the ego in our effort can poison it. So effort has to be balanced by surrender.

ii) *If effort is absent*, one's surrender becomes vain and unworthy, almost slavish. In surrender without effort, we run the risk of being driven by emotion or sentiment, and there lies the danger – that is what *Fanaticism* is made of.

Until enlightenment comes we have no *equipment* higher than the intellect, and no *authority* higher than the Shrutis. On this spiritual path we are restricted only by the subtlety and sharpness of our Intellect, and the intensity and stability of our Faith. Faith, going hand in hand with the intellect, is the only way open for us.

Converting Faith to Conviction

The relationship between all the processes involved in enquiry is given as follows:

STAGE	PROCESS		WHAT IT INVOLVES
Stage 1:	SRAVANAM	⇨	1. ***Receiving the Knowledge*** ⇨
Stage 2:	**MANANAM**	⇨	2. ***Faith*** + 3. ***Logic*** + 4. ***Enquiry*** ⇨
		⇨	5. ***Experience*** ⇨ 6. ***Conviction*** ⇨
Stage 3:	NIDIDHYASANAM	⇨	7. ***Discovery through meditation.***

Faith could arise due to the authority and reverence in which we hold the scriptures, or it could be due even to the authority of a Guru whom we love and in whose words we trust. This initial basis of faith is vital, for it keeps us focused on the pursuit of the Goal.

When well-nurtured, *faith* grows and grows with time. As from seed to tree, so also from faith to conviction. Given the water of *logic* and the sunlight of *enquiry*, faith begins to *experience* change. Each cycle of logic-enquiry-experience brings about an incremental transformation in faith. What starts as emotional appreciation goes through the many such cycles to become firm and *unshakeable conviction*.

The ultimate test of faith is actual *Discovery*. A series of experiences, each one taking us closer and closer to the Goal, marks the route to the ultimate Experience.

In this process of transforming faith into conviction and culminating it in Discovery, we have a perfect picture of what the purpose of Vedantic Sadhana is.

CONCLUSION: Vedanta Can "Make" or "Break"

Both intellect and heart have to undergo strengthening. The intellect is trained to become a piercing sword; and the heart is trained to become a soft, compassionate and humble instrument like a flute. If we neglect the one in pursuit of the other, we will develop in a lop-sided manner. This can destroy us, meaning we can become unbalanced.

Imbalance of head and heart have dire consequences. Such people become dangerous to society. They can become aggressive preachers, misrepresenting Vedanta to the world, spreading their imbalance to others, and fanning the flames of differences rather than bringing people together.

> ***In other words, Vedanta can help us find ourselves, but, if we are careless, it can also destroy us!***

The loving message of Acharyaji is: "Practise Integral Yoga. Develop all aspects of the personality, not just the intellect. An all-round programme that includes cultivation of the heart is also essential to Vedantins."

We cannot ask for more caring advice than that given above by beloved Acharyaji. Taking this advice we can proceed safely along the path of Sadhana.

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SANNYASA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 4: Step 19-20

MANANA: AVOIDING ARGUMENTS

THE JOURNEY TO THE Self is, indeed, the most arduous of all scientific researches. It's a one-man research – one works on himself. It is also the most demanding, as it requires one to pay the price of his *whole life* for it. Such is the nature of our topic today.

In the present context of Mananam, the services of the intellect are called for. At its best, the intellect is indispensable as a tool of enquiry. However, the play of Nature goes on in it as in all other human instruments. **Argumentativeness** is its number one drawback.

Our intellect, left to revel in intellectual gymnastics, will want to venture into and savour the thrills of intriguing logic, as we find in Nyaya. At this point in Sadhana, the seeker is being asked to beware of going on an intellectual "high".

Step 19:	दुस्तर्कात्सुविरम्यतां	*Dus tarkaat suviram-yataam*
	Avoid perverse arguments.	

The warning given here is to avoid ***Dustarka*** or "*wicked concepts*", to recognize them and steer clear of them, however tempting they may be to the intellect. The aspirant should steer clear of all "*Intellectual Politics*".

THE POORVAPAKSHIN & THE SIDDHAANTIN

A debate is always between two people, namely, the ***Poorvapakshin*** who stands for the Opponent, and the ***Siddhaantin*** who stands for the Exponent. These two terms, if looked at etymologically, reveal a side of Vedanta that is not so easily known in the West, and rare to find in the West.

i) **Poorvapakshin**: literally this means "*the earlier viewpoint*", *Poorvapakshee*.
ii) **Siddhaantin**: literally this means "*the final perfect viewpoint*", *Siddhaantee*.

The very word meaning indicates the large-heartedness of Vedanta. The words do not really stand for opponent or exponent. Those are English terms chosen from English culture. In Vedanta no view is seen as an opposing view. If it is not fully informed, it is considered only to be an *earlier* view, a view that is temporarily held in the absence of further knowledge. Once more knowledge is gathered and taken into account, one shifts his viewpoint, until with complete knowledge, he arrives at the perfect (***siddha***), final (***antah***) viewpoint.

There is no personal claim to any viewpoint. Vedanta never speaks of 'my' view and 'your' view. The viewpoint does not belong to any person, it belongs to the *landscape*, the ground we are standing on. Where a person stands in relation to the Truth is the view he sees. He cannot help seeing that view only. If he rises a little higher, his view changes to another one. If he gets to the top of the mountain, his view is "final and perfect".

TYPES OF PHILOSOPHICAL DEBATES

Two people, **A** & **B**, can get together with the following three types of intentions in holding a philosophical discussion:

i) **VAADA**: "*Both persons desire to know the truth*." **A** & **B** have an open mind which has not formed any fixed opinion on the matter. Both have a *Sattwic* interest in the Truth.

ii) **JALPA**: "*Both persons intend to destroy the other's position and establish their own position*." **A** & **B** have each decided their standpoint. Each one tries to prove the other one wrong. The aim of the discussion is *Rajasic* – to gain victory over the other.

iii) **VITHANDA**: "*One person intends only to destroy the other's position without having a view of his own*." Person **A** merely aims to disprove **B**'s position, whatever that may be. The aim is simply to destroy. This is a *Tamasic* stance, useful to none.

Some Examples of Perverse Argumentation:

The intellect is a neutral instrument that can take us to the Truth or away from it – it all depends on what direction we give it, or what job its master gives it. Given below are four cases, in order of increasing perversion, to illustrate such arguments.

1. Just Shallow Thinking: Nyaya holds that there are many Atmans, as many as there are living beings. This is based on the observation that the joys and sorrows of each individual are different, and hence each Atman is different. Vedanta says that the Atman is one, it is indivisible from others; the joys and sorrows belong to the mind, not the Atman. If the pots are different, we cannot conclude that the spaces inside are also different.

2. Ill-Intentioned Arguments: There are scholars who have twisted grammar rules to give the opposite meaning to the Mahavakyas. We have to be careful of such scholars in philosophy. They are able to take up any stand and write a philosophy on it!

3. Distorted, Misplaced Intelligence: *Intelligence*r alone is no guarantee to reach the Goal. Some consider happiness has a linear relation to quantity. If one ice-cream brings happiness, ten will bring ten times the happiness! This is sheer distorted thinking.

4. Deluded, Materialistic Thinking: Some argue as follows: "The Vedas proclaim that pleasure is mixed with pain, so we should abandon it. Are you going to throw away a whole paddy-field of rice of fine quality just because it has husk in it? Don't be foolish. Just find a way to clean out the husk, and then enjoy the rice to your heart's content." Their idea is to simply to enjoy sense pleasures without any restraint. This is thick delusion.

THE SCHOOLS OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Indian philosophy has six theistic schools which accept the authority of the Vedas, and six atheistic schools which do not accept the Vedas as authority. The schools are:

A. *Aastika* or THEISTIC Schools: Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Saankhya, Yoga, Poorva Meemamsa and Uttara Meemansa (or Vedanta).

B. *Naastika* or ATHEISTIC Schools: Chaarvaka (materialism), 4 Bauddhistic schools, and Jainism.

Step 20: श्रुति मतस्तर्कोऽनुसंधीयताम् । ***Shruti matah tarkah anusandheeyataam***

Follow the discriminative rationale of the Srutis.

The Rationale of the Upanishads

This Step in Manana advises the Vedantic student to stick to Vedic logic. It is not that the student is forbidden from using his intellect. On the contrary, he is encouraged to establish firm ground for Vedantic principles. For that reason alone is enquiry given so much importance. However, the student is advised to do so using the rationale approved by the Srutis, which is not prone to *perversion*. What differentiates this rationale from others?

Vedic rationale discriminates between *the Real and the unreal*. That is its special feature. There are uses of logic where this fact is totally ignored, as In the academic fields. The seeker of Truth is solely concerned with discriminating Truth from Falsity.

DIFFERENT GOALS OF THE SIX DARSHANAS

SCHOOLS WHICH DO NOT go the full distance with the Vedas are called **Taarkika** schools. Tarkika means "*grounded in logic*".

Hinduism as a School: The overall plan of Hinduism is to be a "School of Religion" with different classes in it. It is not a problem in Hinduism that some retain their own ideas based on the inclinations of their own intellect or mind, and are unable to accept the whole teaching of the Vedas. They go as far as they can.

Divergence of Schools: The more a school gives preference to one's own intellect rather than the Vedas, the more will it *diverge* from the ultimate Goal set by the Vedas. This is the cause of all differences in philosophic viewpoints: The Charvakas live only to please the body, others only to please their mind, yet others to please their intellect, and finally the Vedantin who wishes to pleases none but the Supreme Truth.

Handling Imperfections: If there are any disagreements with Shrutis, Vedantins consider it to be due to imperfections in one's own intellect, and not imperfections in the Shrutis. Only Vedanta goes the full distance with the Shrutis and hold them to be undeniable, faultless and correct in every way.

An Example of Vedic Rationale

To establish a relationship between any two things, the common principle between them is sought. To relate two ornaments, the common material is *gold*. A steel bowl and a glass plate may be related by their common *function* in the kitchen. If there is nothing in common, one may go to the atomic level and see them both as *atoms*. The atheistic schools go further. They ask What about a vacuum having no atoms? Thus Space or *emptiness* is taken as the common factor. Space is God for these philosophers.

In this way, the limited vision of the Truth determines the relationship. The Vedantin takes the enquiry to the Absolute level. The Vedantin goes to the highest and deepest level of enquiry. He finds that even Space is part of creation and rests upon the substratum of Sat or Existence. Thus he takes the Absolute or Sat to be the common factor for all things in the universe. Brahman, the Absolute, is defined as Existence Absolute in Vedanta.

<u>**Loyalty & Faith Redefined**</u>

The above rationale adopted by Vedanta gives rise to some novel definitions to these two important spiritual principles:

1. Defining Loyalty: Vedanta see Loyalty as that stirling quality by which one is not deflected from one's enquiry by limited standpoints. This does not mean narrow-mindedness. We simply stick to the Upanishads firmly, and practise what they ask of us.

Vedantins remain loyal to the highest viewpoint possible. They stay in their Vedantic mansion, and enjoy the panoramic view from the vantage point of their terrace!

2. Defining Faith: In the light of this approach. Faith is firm adherence to the Upanishads, knowing that they will always lead us to the ultimate Truth consistently.

In sticking to the Upanishadic principles, no ill-will or hostility is intended to other viewpoints. Indian tradition respects other viewpoints, never taking them as opponents, but as a test to prove the validity of one's own position.

<u>**Taking the Best from the Rest**</u>

Indeed, Vedanta takes the best from the other schools and incorporates them into itself. This is not a dream comparison. Here are the facts:

i) Vedanta took <u>*logic*</u> from the Naiyayikas;
ii) It took <u>*creativity*</u> from the Sankhyas;
iii) It took the techniques of <u>*mind-control*</u> from the Yogis; and
iv) It took the science of <u>*analytical presentation*</u> from the Meemamsakas.

Vedanta remains ever grateful to them for their gifts.

Thus, with no animosity at heart, Vedantins are well trained to handle all sorts of philosophical standpoints. They find no need to argue with those who do not agree with them. True broadmindedness can come only from a viewpoint as wide and accommodating as that of Vedanta.

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SANNYASA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 5: Steps 21-22

NIDIDHYASANA: CONTEMPLATION ON THE SELF

IN THE QUEST FOR Knowledge, three things are involved: the means of knowledge, the object of knowledge and the subject of knowledge.

The object and the means of knowledge do not change. The subject is the only *variable* item in the knowledge chain, and is the most difficult to rectify. There are flaws in the knower which stand in the way of the full experience of knowledge. This is the weakest link of the chain, and today we are going to see how it can be rectified.

Perspective on Sravana, Manana & Nididhysana

Sravana deals with the proper *means of knowledge* or the process of knowing. The correct Pramana to obtain knowledge of Brahman is the Srutis. This is explained to the aspiring student. Then in **Manana**, through deep intellectual enquiry, all doubts about the *object* of knowledge are resolved. Finally we come to the third stage of Sadhana known as **Nididhyasana**. This deals with the *subject* or the knower who knows the knowledge.

"Manmohan's Dream Car": Here is a nice little analogy that illustrates how all the three stages are interlinked. You and I are Manmohan in the story. 'Manmohan' means one whose mind has been enchanted. By what? By a strong desire to possess something.

Manmohan dreams of a CAR often, until one day he actually takes time to go to the showroom of a car dealer and see it for himself. The car represents ***Identity with Brahman***, our goal. The first stage towards that goal is to go to the showroom, the ***Guru's Ashram***, and learn about the Car directly from the salesman there, the ***Guru*** or the perfect Master.

The salesman explains to Manmohan all the technical details about the car in the showroom. This represents ***Sravana***. In this stage Manmohan gets all the knowledge he requires about the Car that is going to give him Absolute Bliss and peace.

Manmohan is very impressed by what the saleman tells him. He has his own few doubts about the capabilities of the car. He asks the salesman to clear these doubts. They are simple things like the fuel consumption, the AC system, the transmission system, the boot capacity, etc. Having received satisfactory replies to these, he prepares to leave the showroom. This represents the ***Manana*** stage when all doubts are cleared.

Before leaving the showroom, Manmohan does not forget to get all the details of the cost of the car. That is uppermost in his mind as he wants to soon possess the car. The price is 100% ***Chitta Shuddhi*** or freedom from all other desires except that for the Car; and 100% ***Chitta Ekagrata*** or one-pointed thought of the Car alone. Manmohan needs to give up many things he would have liked to do as he needs to save every bit for the car. He lives with austerity and simplicity – a life of ***Renunciation***. His whole mind is centred on the Car.

He has chosen the most expensive car. He does not have the money all at once. It is going to take a pretty long time for him to earn the required sum. Until he pays every instalment, he cannot take delivery of the vehicle and it will remain in the showroom. The hard work to earn the money represents the ***Nididhyasana*** stage.

This metaphor is extended later under Step 36 when we deal with the Highest Flight.

<u>The Hurdle of Latent Subconscious Impressions</u>

All hurdles in Sadhana arise in an atmosphere of *<u>impurity</u>*. We fall short in Chitta Shuddhi. Purity of mind has not developed sufficiently to overcome them. The various stages and Steps in Sadhana, are primarily differentiated by different levels of purity in the mind. As we grow in purity of heart, we progress or pass from one step to the next.

Impurities are of various types. We have dealt with the gross forms in earlier stages of Sadhana. In this advanced stage of spiritual life we are concerned with impurities that are deeply embedded in our subconscious mind. They can be removed only through intense meditation. To remove these is the purpose of Nididhyasana.

Four steps are devoted to Nididhyasana in *Sadhana Panchakam*. Typical of Sri Shankaracharyaji's style, they form two pairs. Today we cover the first pair, Steps 21 & 22, that deal with the removal of latent, deep-seated, subconscious impressions in the mind. It is the most essential part of Nididhyasana.

The question that remains unanswered so far is: With all the knowledge gained so far, how has this changed our life? Why do we still go on living as we lived before, in spite of the knowledge? We still do things contrary to what is expected of us in the light of the knowledge learnt. Although we know it intellectually, we still act contrary to it. Why does this happen? It seems as if all our hard-earned knowledge "goes to sleep", as it were. This is the core issue that Nididhyasana addresses, and the finger points to the latent impressions within each of us. They are what actually brought about our entry into this world.

<u>Viparita Bhavana – What is It?</u>

These entrenched "old habits", deep impressions or hidden tendencies is what Vedanta calls Vasanas or **Viparita Bhavana.** It is our past, programmed way of thinking. This is such a major factor in our mental make-up that it refuses to budge even when knowledge is present in the intellect. Viparita Bhavana is a specific brand of *<u>Obstacles</u>* that arise and defy our onward march to the Goal.

<u>How Habits are Created</u>

To understand how to destroy these troublesome Vasanas, we need to learn about how they were created in the first place. They did not just appear from nowhere; they were created by ourselves in many births. This study forms an interesting topic in itself.

From Vasanas arise all thoughts, and from thoughts arise all actions. That is the logical sequence connecting these three levels.

i) At the Karana or *causal* level, ***Vasanas*** or subconscious tendencies predominate.

ii) At the Sukshma or *subtle* level of the mind, ***Thoughts and Feelings*** predominate.

iii) At the Sthula or *gross* level of the physical body, ***Actions*** predominate.

Vasanas resemble the grooves of a *<u>gramophone record</u>*. The grooves were originally produced by sound. Once produced, the grooves are able reproduce the same sounds when the record is played. Vasanas behave in an identical manner.

It is interesting to note that Vasanas are originally created by the repetition of a particular *<u>thought pattern</u>*. When these Vasanas begin to sprout or become active from their dormant state, we become aware of them only through thoughts that arise in our subtle body. These thoughts are the same thought patterns which produced the Vasanas after many repetitions. The formation of Vasanas require much effort. For instance, our identification with our **name** required a lot of time before we accepted it as our identity.

Our Name is an example of a Vasana implanted in this birth itself. There are many other Vasanas which were implanted in numerous previous births! How far back this extends is impossible to say.

NIDIDHYASANA – How Habits Can be Destroyed

Unlike intellectual doubts that can be cleared in Manana, Vasanas are too deeply rooted and terribly stubborn, and are beyond the scope of enquiry. Something more drastic, a "*Surgical Strike*", so to say, is required to clear them. That 'surgery' is provided by Nididhyasana. Nididhyasana, or deep meditation on the Self, is the Step that deals the death blow to these stubborn tendencies in our mind.

We are now ready to grasp the meaning of Step 21.

Step 21:	**ब्रह्मास्मीतिविभाव्यतामहरहः**
	"Brahma asmi" iti vibhaavyataam ahah ahah
	Always be absorbed in the thought, "I am Brahman".

By reversing the process that created the Vasanas, we can start destroying them. It requires at least the same effort, if not more, to destroy Vasanas as it did to produce them. This process is called Nididhyasana. Step 21 captures the positive part of this process: i.e. planting the single Vasana of ***Aham Brahma Asmi*** or the thought "*I am Brahman*", which is a pure Sattwic Vasana, and therefore highly desirable.

How Does "Aham Brahmaasmi" Work?

We have said that Doubts arise in an environment of mental impurity. Lack of purity belie the presence of anger, lust, greed, jealousy, hatred and delusion. If these were not present, doubts would not arise, and mere Sravana would suffice to awaken us into the state of illumination! This is something to think about.

However, in practice totally pure souls are very rare in this world. We don't have to feel bad when negative thoughts arise. Spiritual life is, after all, a gradual evolution. We will get there when the moment is ripe. The negative thoughts simply draw our attention to the immediate problem that we need to deal with in our Sadhana.

Recently at the Ashram Academy, many alien gum trees had to be chopped down. At first the branch tips containing the leaves were sawn off. Then the branches themselves were cut up. Finally, the thick trunk was cut in small manageable-sized segments until only the stump was left. The procedure may be compared to removal of Vasanas. First the weak Vasanas are removed, then the tougher ones and lastly the toughest.

Forming the New Habit of "Aham Brahmasmi"

The solution lies in replacing the body-idea with a new idea – "*I am Brahman*" –

i) for a sufficiently long time;
ii) continuously, without a break;
iii) with devotion and conscientiousness;
iv) with concerted effort (Abhyasa); and
v) with the right intention accompanying the whole process –

This is called Nididhyasana. One *big effort*, and the job is done!

Step 22: गर्वः परित्यज्यतां ***Garvah parityajyataam***

Renounce pride.

One grave danger faces us In undertaking the above de-programming of our old habit patterns. "*I am Brahman*" has the potential to make us feel *proud*, because now we may begin to feel that we are "a cut above the rest"; that we are not ordinary beings but someone special – after all, who can be more special than "*Brahman*"!

The Ego tries to creep in through the back door!

The subtle or Sattwic pride of being superior has to be carefully warded off. This is the problem addressed in this step. With accomplishment comes subtle pride. While the intellect may be quick to recognize its growth, the Ego is even quicker to claim the credit!

How to Give Up Sattwic Pride

The methods we used earlier will not help now. At that time we were dealing with Tamasic and Rajasic pride, so we used Sattwa as an antidote to overcome it. We told ourselves, "It is not me, I am just an instrument". That method cannot work now.

The "*I am Body*" thought and the "*I am Brahman*" thought appear very similar. We know that the former comes from the mind. The chances are that the latter, too, can come from from the same place, and with greater intensity! The intellect has grown strong and powerful now, and so too can the Ego-feeling if we are not careful.

When we are engaged in grappling with the thought that "I am *not* the body, nor the mind, nor the intellect; I am Brahman," the arena for this struggle starts in the intellect. But it should not remain there. That is where the danger of Pride setting in lies. The intellect has to be transcended. These affirmations need to come from the Witness, not the intellect.

To overcome pride that has reached the Sattwic level, we need to get help from a *higher* level than the Sattwic intellect. That comes from Meditation. In meditation our effort is to be the *witness* of the mind. That is where the help comes from. We take recourse to the deepest level in our being – the innermost Self. The removal of Sattwic pride lies in identifying with a centre higher than the intellect, namely, the inner witness consciousness.

It is not possible for the mind to instruct itself in such matters. The danger of self-deception is too great. The witness consciousness has to feed the thought, "I am not the body; I am Brahman." Then alone will the Ego vacate its stronghold.

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SANNYASA ASHRAMA (Contd) – 6: Steps 23-24

NIDIDHYASANA: GIVING UP THE "BODY-IDEA"

WE CONTINUE WITH the subject of Nididhyasana in Sannyasa Ashrama Sadhana, also called Jnana Kanda Sadhana. Today we cover Steps 23 & 24, thus concluding the topic which began six talks ago with Step 13.

A small but dedicated percentage of humanity upholds this level of Sadhana. The primary Sadhana in Nididhyasana is to renounce wrong *Identification* at three levels, namely the physical body, the mind and the intellect. When we speak of Body with a capital B, all three instruments are referred to, otherwise we write body in lower case to refer to the physical body alone.

In the last talk we elaborately discussed **Viparita Bhavana**, the vast storehouse of tendencies locked in our subconscious mind that holds us locked to our Body. We then took a theoretical look at establishing the "I am Brahman" thought by which we rise into divine consciousness. Today we pay attention to the practical dificulty in achieving this. We focus on the Body itself in order and learn how best to overcome identification with it.

Step 23: देहेऽहं मतिरुझ्यतां *Dehe aham matirujhyataam*

Renounce the delusory conception, "I am the Body".

If we take a close look, we will notice that the majority of our habits are based upon the thought "I am the body", or "I am the mind", or "I am the intellect".

The DIRECT solution to breaking down the old habit patterns is to give up the false identification with the Body.

However, the old grooves are so strongly set that our life still flows along the deep channels impressed upon it by the *Body* idea. The old tenant refuses to vacate the apartment to allow the new tenant to occupy it. It puts up a huge struggle to stay put.

Although the task of evicting the old Samskaras seems difficult, we must remember that we are dealing with a Sadhaka who is quite advanced already. He has made big sacrifices to come to this point. With the knowledge from Sravana and the development of a firm conviction from Manana as his advantages, it is not so difficult for him to unlearn old habits. He has the advantage of greater understanding and more maturity on the spiritual path to tackle this problem. He has made himself worthy of the attempt.

Examining the Effects of "Body" Identification

Clinging to body, mind and intellect is an *unseen cause*, hard to deal with. However, it is easier to deal with the *seen effects* of the clinging. Being visible, they are easier to rectify. Being visible, they also cannot tell a lie, cannot be disguised, and cannot be denied. Not only can we see them, but those around us can see them pretty well, too! – perhaps more clearly than we do.

This unseen Cause has six Army chiefs that protect their interests. It is these chiefs that we need to wage a war against. The first three are the Brigadiers that are extremely powerful. They are **Kama**, **Krodha** and **Lobha** – i.e. *Lust*, *Anger* and *Greed*. The other three are the Lieutenants. They are **Moha**, **Mada** and **Maatsarya** – i.e. *Delusion*, *Pride* and *Envy* (or jealousy). The Bhagavad Geeta speaks of the Brigadiers as being at the root of all our wrongdoing.

The *strongest urges* of the mind are the last to leave. They stay in the fort and send the smaller soldiers forth to fight. They surface in the dying moments of the battle (i.e. during Nididhyasana), and can put up a very stiff resistance to all our efforts at meditation.

1. LUST: If proper caution is not taken, *sexual urges or Lust* at this stage can become very troublesome, since this is one of the strongest urges in nature. Lust is the Brigadier who is the last to leave the Body that is being stormed. Since this is an urge seated in the mind and not the body, the age of the seeker is immaterial. There are no age exemptions to this urge! Lustful imaginations are the effects to become aware of and destroy.

2. ANGER: This is another major natural tendency – a Brigadier. Again, the mind is its seat. When we are laying siege on the stronghold of Desire, its self-sustaining mechanism flares up in fury as the effects of Anger. These tell us how we stand in relation to Anger.

3. GREED: Compulsive cravings, either for food, money, power, etc, can be very troublesome. They are very hard to destroy. Small pebbles of cravings can soon become boulders of desires. We can measure their effects easily – by the amount we eat, by our bank balance and our possessions.

Pride, Delusion and Jealousy have an executive function and serve as the hand maidens of the three Brigadiers. The above "Big Six" are the Army Staff of Body identification. Their task is to fight tooth and nail to maintain the Body-idea. They represent the strongest forces of Nature. *Intellectual Pride* is specifically dealt with in the next Step.

The task in Nididhyasana is to note down the presence of these six generals in every thought that arises during meditation. The meditator observes them as a witness, does not allow himself to get involved with them, and watches them pass by and dissolve, wave after wave. By this technique, the Samskaras or Viparita Bhavana get neutralised as they arise in their thought forms in the mind. It is a very painstaking task, but the reward is very great.

Step 24: **बुध जनैर्वादः परित्यज्यताम् ॥३॥** ***Budha janaih vaadah parityajyataam***

Give up totally the tendency to argue with wise men.

Winning An Argument with One's Superiors

Winning an argument is undoubtedly the most powerful ego-booster, expanding its existence and enhancing itself. Nothing gives the ego greater joy than winning an argument!

Arguing is just another strategy of the ego not to yield an inch of ground. The egoistic intellect has an insatiable desire to win an argument. We may win, but we must consider ourselves to be defeated spiritually. We are digging our own grave!

To argue with perverse people is bad enough; we saw that in Step 19. How much more should we avoid arguing with holy men, whom we revere as our superiors? It is unpardonable to win an argument against the wise. Spiritually that spells disaster.

The spiritual aspirant, having worked so hard to reach this high stage, would be very foolish if he wasted all this merit on merely trying to win an argument. Arguing is a sheer waste of effort in terms of one's spiritual progress; it achieves nothing.

Arguing with intelligent people, is very enticing for a developed intellect. It sees in it a chance to "tickle" itself for the fun of it. The true seeker is advised never to get into arguments with anyone, however intelligent that person may be.

Tips on Avoiding Arguments

1. Seclusion: An argument usually takes place in the company of others – not only is the opposition *humiliated* but Mr Ego gets the fringe benefit of developing a fan club!

For this very reason, in Sadhana seclusion is recommended so that there is no chance for the ego to meet anyone to argue with. The ego is denied the very opportunity of having a sparring partner. Its intellectual diet is cut off – it is put on an "argument fast"!

2. Avoid the "Worldly" Wise: 'Wise men' could refer to intelligent people of *other schools of thought*, with whom it would be most thrilling (to the ego) to have an argument and to win it! This interpretation makes this step an extension of Step 19, and is therefore redundant here.

3. Danger of Losing Wise Company: Implied in this step is the advice: Do not cut yourself off from the wise by engaging them in an argument. Having arguments with the truly wise is the sure to make *them* avoid us! The wise will simply *step out of our way*. They are not interested in arguments. We would be the losers. Instead of nurturing their company, we would lose their company.

4. Danger of Avoiding Wise Company: An aspect of pride is that it *does not want to listen* to anybody. It feels self-sufficient, and not in need of any advice from others. So it avoids wise people. This is self-destructive. The alert seeker keeps himself open to correction.

CONCLUSION

This is a very significant Conclusion. It concludes three themes at once:

i) Firstly, we are ending the sub-topic of *Nididhyasana*, the last 4 steps;

ii) Secondly, we also end the main topic of *Sannyasa Ashrama*, the last 12 steps; and

iii) Thirdly, we conclude the discussion of the *Four Ashramas*, all 24 steps so far.

We shall summarise on all three fronts; it is a Triple Conclusion:

1. Concluding Nididhyasana

Nididhyasana in practice is described as the effort to *remember God* ("I am Brahman") at every moment. It is attaching ourselves to God. Another way of looking at the same struggle is to see it as our effort to *forget the world* ("I am not Body") at every moment. It is detaching ourselves from all the attractions of the world.

Acharyaji gave the example of Appayya Dikshitar's passion for God. Appayya Dikshitar was an ancestor of Gurudev Swami Sivananda. Once, in a state of Super-consciousness, he kept repeating "I am Brahman".

The death-blow is given to the ego when we resist all occasions to argue, for whatever reason. The ego is denied its greatest pleasure – to see its opposition "crushed" or "pulverised" in an argument.

2. Concluding Sannyasa Ashrama

In Sannyasa Ashrama, the external arrangements are all seen to by the support obtained from the society. The Indian tradition upholds the practice of spiritual Sadhana, whether in Sannyasa Ashrama stage at the tail end of life or as young Sannyasis spending all their time in doing Sadhana.

The purpose of Sannyasa Ashrama is to bring the seeker to Savikalpa Samadhi in the shortest possible time. Other paths exist, too, which bring the seeker to this point, such as Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Raja Yoga.

When Nididhyasana culminates in Savikalpa Samadhi, the main purpose of Sannyasa Ashrama is complete. All the hard work is done, the major effort of clearing one's past impressions is over. The Sadhana resumes in Step 33 when the seeker moves towards Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

3. Concluding the Four Ashramas

The first 24 Steps cover the full life-Plan as envisaged by Indian tradition. By following the spirit of the four divisions in life, we maximise our spiritual progress in this single birth. The plan takes into account the need of the individual to evolve spiritually. Spiritual evolution is built into the life of the Hindu through such an organised Plan over one's whole Life-Span.

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Verse 4: *PROTECTION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE* (Steps 25-32)

PRACTICE OF TAPAS: Steps 25-28

AUSTERITY – VOLUNTARY HARDSHIPS

VERSE FOUR IS LIKE AN interval between the just-completed stage of Nididhyasana and "the Highest Flight" or Samadhi which starts in Verse 5. We usually associate an interval with refreshments and tea or cooldrinks. Sri Shankaracharyaji, of course, has a different idea – instead of chips and ice-cream, he plans a refreshment of intense **austerities**! Masters can be unrelenting, but we shall soon be thanking him for this.

The verse is split into two equal parts. The first four, Steps 25-28, being covered today, are on **TAPAS**, while the last four, Steps 29-32, deal with **TITIKSHA**. The two are very similar and some see no difference in them. However, the former are *voluntary, known* hardships undertaken through self-denial, whilst the latter are *involuntary, unknown* hardships which life throws at us from time to time; and over which we have no control.

Steps 25-28 are connected in an unusual way. In a Google map, as we zoom in, we see more details coming into view: first the cities appear; then the main roads; then all the roads; and finally each building is shown. In the same way, Sri Shankaracharyaji brilliantly *zooms in on Tapas* to give us more and more of its essence with each rule!

General Aspects of TAPAS

1. The aim of Tapas or voluntary austerity is twofold: i) to increase the fire of *yearning* for God; and ii) to serve as a Prayaschitta Karma and increase our level of *purity*.

2. All 4 Steps under Tapas appear to deal with **food**. True, the tongue is more mischievous and undisciplined than the other senses, so more attention is given to it. However, if we think of "food" to mean *sense objects for all five senses*, we obtain the fullest meaning of these four Steps. The whole topic then takes on a new colouring.

3. A general rule for Tapas is that it should be *sensible* and observed to the best of our ability. Gurudev Sivananda was very strongly against *moorkha* or foolish Tapas.

Step 25: क्षुद्व्याधिश्च चिकित्स्यतां *Kshud vyaadhih cha chikitsyataam*

In hunger and disease get treated.

Sri Shankaracharyaji seems to have deliberately and cleverly worded this to invite two different interpretations, both of which carry some merit.

1. *Hunger as a Disease*: Hunger is regarded as another bodily disease that needs to be treated with the appropriate medicine – *food*. As with any disease, so with hunger – we should not ignore it, but treat it properly with the most effective means to "cure" it. It comes three times a day – and is treated by breakfast, lunch and supper!

Every car is fitted with a petrol gauge. When the dial falls into the red zone, it tells us that fuel is low and needs to be topped up. Hunger is a similar warning sign from the body, telling us that the body's energy levels are running low – "It is time to top up," says the body. Eating when hungry is the plan of Mother Nature.

Medicine, care and rest have to be taken as required. The body is the "temple of God"; it is wise to take good care of it, and not subject it to foolish austerity. It is the only vehicle we have for the soul's journey to gather further experiences. If the body's hunger is ignored, it will hit back at us with vengeance.

2. *Hunger as a Treatment*: Here, both hunger and disease are regarded as treatments. For what disease? The disease is our spiritual illness – ignorance of the Self. We do not cure the pangs of hunger and disease but are cured *by* the pangs. The cure is for the soul, not the body. In other words, self-denial or **Fasting** is advocated here as a purificatory or expiatory treatment. It is a Prayaschitta Karma. Hunger is voluntarily accepted as a Tapas. This is what Tapas means, and this is a more suitable interpretation.

Fasting is particularly effective for developing control over the senses. When indulgence has run amok, intensive treatment is needed, which may include methods such as fasting. So Fasting becomes a Sadhana. It is one of the more common forms of Tapas practised by many people, especially in India. One reason is it is easy; another is it is entirely within one's own control and capacity; and a third is it does not cost anything!

In all religions, fasting is advocated. Christians fast over the Lent period. Muslims fast over the Ramazaan period. Hindus have endless occasions to fast – Ramnaumi or Krishnashtami, Ekadashi or Pradosha, Shivaratri or Navaratri, and many more. In this way, the body becomes the doorway to immortality.

Step 26: **प्रतिदिनं भिक्षौषधं भुज्यतां** ***Pratidinam bhikshaushadham bhujyataam***

Daily take the medicine of Bhiksha.

Double meaning is not ideal in a rule; it lends itself to a big loophole. People can choose to take the first option for the above Step just to avoid the Tapas. Sri Shankaracharya zooms in a bit to plug the loophole. He introduces the idea of Bhikhsha so that we can clearly see the sanctity of *food* as well as the sanctity of *procuring* it.

Bhiksha & Prasad – A Sanctified Means for a Sanctified Object

1. Traditionally, **Bhiksha** is food begged by Sannyasins from householders. The householder gives it, knowing that the receiver is especially dedicated to the spiritual path. Equally, the Sannyasin receives it and blesses the giver, knowing that a share of his spiritual merit goes to the receiver. Thus both giver and receiver are blessed by this form of charity.

2. Food is viewed as coming from the Divine Mother Herself, and is received and given with great respect and reverence. It is treated as sacred **Prasad** of the Lord.

3. Prasad or sanctified food offered during a prayer is meant to be kept very simple – usually a single grain is cooked or some fruit is cut and offered at the shrine and distributed to those attending after the prayer is completed. In the case of Bhiksha, it is to be obtained from visiting a maximum of 5 homes and should not contain any luxury items. It is not intended to be a feast.

4. Sanctified food, eaten as the Lord's Prasad, becomes the medicine for the body, according to the first meaning of Step 25. Taste is not a primary consideration here.

However, Shankaracharyaji saw what was happening in practice. People were making elaborate Prasad dishes and Bhikshas were turning into special occasions for feasting. People began offering many delicacies to the Lord, and enjoy them as Prasad!

Further zooming became necessary to plug this new loophole . . .

Step 27: स्वाद्वन्नम् न तु याच्यतां ***Svaadu annam na tu yaachyataam***

Have no craving for delicious food.

Sri Shankaracharyaji now tries another way to stop this abuse. He says there should be no craving for delicious food, for it goes against the very spirit of Tapas. He hopes that this rule will help people to maintain simplicity in food for the sake of good health.

Cravings & Aversions

The key point in this Step is to "avoid likes and dislikes" over food. Swami Sivananda offers a golden guideline: "Don't eat only what you like, nor avoid everything that you dislike." Elsewhere he says, "Everyday avoid at least one thing that you like; and everyday eat at least one thing that you dislike." In this way, the great Master always alerted his disciples to the danger of likes and dislikes, the principle behind such rules.

Ask a Sadhaka living in a remote place where delicacies are not easily available, how disturbed he can get when he sees them coming to the Ashram!

Besides being a temptation to the senses, tasty foods have the added disadvantage of taking more time to prepare, and being invariably more unhealthy. Since time and health are both precious, to render natural foods more tasty by elaborate procedures is wasteful labour. This time can be made available for Sadhana.

Step 27 is meant to "*keep the tongue in its place*." That is the spirit of the rule, but the intellect, as one may expect, finds a way to violate it.

There is an exception to every rule. People have *allergies;* certain foods are to be avoided or taken, not from taste considerations, but because of the allergy to them. Strangely, people are found to be more allergic to unsavoury foods than savoury ones! Some smart ones even say, "He only says that the *craving* should not be there; he does not say we should not have delicious food. I am not craving and eating!"

Sri Shankaracharya finally zooms in to the maximum degree for the fourth rule . . .

Step 28: विधिवशात्प्राप्तेन संतुष्यताम । ***Vidhivashaat praaptena santushyataam***

Live contentedly upon whatever comes to your lot as ordained by Him.

With maximum zooming, the picture is now clearly visible. We have arrived at the very essence of Tapas. There is no possibility of a loophole. If the intellect now finds a way around it, then it is no fault of the Acharya. Such a person cannot be interested in Tapas at all. He has come to the wrong school. Tapas is not for 'inverted' intellects.

The Virtue of Contentment

Contentment is what this Step highlights. In anything in life, the spiritual aspirant is expected to remain contented with what comes ***of its own accord*** to meet one's needs. This is a great lesson in life, and is an attitude that can be consciously cultivated.

Contentment is the very essence of Tapas. One practises Tapas by choice because through it we develop the virtue of contentment. By undergoing self-denial deliberately, we train our minds to be contented with whatever comes to us. Tapas is the best training ground for contentment. Armed with contentment we can face the pinpricks of life with Titiksha; and at the same time ensure that Tapas practices are not used to inflate the Ego.

What appears to be self-denial when seen negatively, is actually contentment from the positive angle. If we can learn to view Tapas in this way, it will make the whole exercise more attractive and fill us with more enthusiasm to practice it. We will have no need to twist the rules and have our own sweet ways.

Surrender to the Lord

In addition to Contentment, this Step fosters the attitude of surrender that the spiritual seeker should have in all matters in life, not just food. The feeling that God is providing exactly what we need should always be present.

Acharyaji made the following observation: "If coffee is not served at Sandeepany, it is not because the Ashram is withholding it from us or cannot afford it, but it is good for us not to have it. The Ashram only becomes a means to work out our Prarabdha! What is due, will come to us – that should always be the attitude of a Sadhaka."

Acharyaji finally gave us two very apt examples:

Example 1: Acharyaji's father was very strict with regard to his son's food habits. The father's friend once tried to get him to be more lenient towards the youngster. The father replied (and this was *overheard* by the son), "If at this age he does not eat what his mother serves on his plate, then how would he learn to "eat" what Life serves on his plate when he grows up?" Since that day, just by overhearing his father's message, Acharyaji has never left anything served on his plate by his caring parents, nor craved any particular food.

Example 2: There was another instance of sweet ladoos brought by a visitor to Swami Tapovanji's Ashram in Uttarkashi. The presence of the ladoos made the disciples restless. They were wondering when Swamiji was going to distribute them. Days went by, yet there was no sign of the ladoos. Some disciples suspected that Swamiji was eating them all by himself. Disillusioned by this thought, they left the place. Eventually, when Swamiji came to know of what was going on in everyone's mind, he took out the ladoos, all intact, and asked for the whole lot to be thrown into the Ganges for the fish. That was Swami Tapovanji's remedy for restlessness of the tongue!

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PRACTICE OF TITIKSHA: Steps 29-32

ENDURANCE – FACING THE PIN-PRICKS OF LIFE

We now come to the second half of Verse 4 that deals with **Titiksha** or Endurance. Here again we find there is an order: The first three Steps cover the common difficulties we endure in each of the three aspects of life, and the fourth combines them all:

i) Step 29: deals with the physical level – the *deed*;
ii) Step 30: deals with the level of speech – the *word*;
iii) Step 31: deals with the mental level – the *thought*;
iv) Step 32 combines all the above three by dealing with our *relationships*.

The Relationship Between Titiksha & Ego

It is a characteristic of Sri Shankara to always put things in a logical sequence. From scrutinising the sequence of these four steps, an interesting fact emerges. We notice that the required Titiksha increases with each Step. The trend is: the greater the blow given to the Ego, the more demanding or challenging becomes the needed Titiksha to endure it.

i) *At the **Body** level*: These Hardships are the least difficult to bear. The reason? Only the smallest of pinches is felt by the Ego, since external difficulties are not directly under the Ego's control. What the Ego cannot control does not disturb it very greatly.

ii) *At the **Speech** level*: The Ego content is more. We are more self-conscious when we speak than when we bear bitter weather. The required endurance is more.

iii) *At the **Mind** level*: We are now virtually in the palace of the Ego. Every thought and feeling is weighed against how the Ego is affected. The pains borne in the mind are commensurately greater, due mainly to the involement of the Ego in every matter.

iv) *At the **relationships** level*: This is where the greatest challenge in endurance is called for. The majority of our problems are people-related. All the previous three are combined in varying degrees to really give our Ego a good churning!

We keep an eye on this trend as we consider each level one by one:

Step 29: **शीतोष्णादि विषह्यतां** ***Sheeta ushna adi vishahyataam***
Endure all the pairs of opposites – heat and cold, and the like.

The Content of Physical Hardships

At the body level, the content of the hardship is predominantly bodily discomfort and pain. The cause of this discomfort and pain is largely some external factor which we have little control over. It may be unbearable weather, either too hot or too cold; it may be deprivation of basic creature comforts due to poverty or natural calamities; it may even be living in unavoidable conditions of squalor, imprisonment or rampant crime. Whatever it may be, there is little we can do about it other than "bite our teeth and bear it".

Yogis needed to have this Titkisha in order to be able to live in Himalayam caves.

Physically, it is not possible to have all the ideal conditions. Nature gives us a "package deal" of mixed conditions, both favourable and unfavourable, wherever we may be. We can safely say that there isn't a place on earth where everything will be perfect.

"What cannot be cured, has to be endured." We should not run after ideal conditions. The conditions we live in are determined by our Karma, our Paapa and Punya. So we just have to be stoical and bear external hardships.

An Example: A man could not bear disturbing sounds. "Noise" was his bugbear. There were some noisy shops in his locality, so he moved to another home where shops were fewer. The noise also made a similar move – it switched from day to night. Now it was a few neighbours who partied frequently till the early hours of the morning – quite unbearable! He moved further away to the outskirts of the city. The noise problem was solved, but commuting became a pain. He was spending more time and money in travelling, enduring more traffic noise. Eventually, he was forced to simply endure his environment.

Step 30: न तु वृथा वाक्यं समुच्चार्यतां *Na tu vrithaa vaakyam samucchaaryataam*

Do not expend a single wasteful word.

Comparing Words With Water

The next level is Speech. Here an analogy will help: The flow of spoken words is like the flow of water from a tap. To start with, water is wasted if the washer of the tap is worn out. No matter how tightly we close the tap, water always leaks out. You may have seen people who just go on muttering something to themselves. It's an unstoppable leak needing a new 'washer' in their throat!

The tap serves a useful purpose. When we are washing our dishes after meals we have to open the tap. However, with care we can use the minimum quantity. If 5 cupfuls can do the job, why use five bucketfuls? Speaking more than we need to is a wastage of words.

Thirdly, there is the criminal wastage of water. Just observe how many people keep their taps fully open while they are still soaping their dishes. It is unpardonable wastage. With words it is just as unpardonable to give someone a tongue-lashing, to indulge in gossip, to speak ill of others, etc. We leave our taps wide open!

The Social Perspective

Living among other people leads to unavoidable communications with them. Whilst company of people can be a source of great pleasure, the opposite can also be true if we do not exercise some control over our tongue. Problems in relationships are invariably due to speaking too much and out of turn. Too much socialising often oversteps the limits and spills over as discord. Excessive usage of words has its price in enduring Pain.

The Spiritual Perspective

When we observe the lives of saints, we find they lead very quiet lives. They not only speak very little, but conduct themselves with great dignity and respect for others. The seeker of Truth soon comes to realise that companionship can be a help in life only when it is respected and not abused or taken for granted.

There are spiritual benefits in restraining the tongue. i) Not uttering a 'wasteful word' may limit our relationships, but it will make available more *time for Sadhana*.

ii) *Immense power* lies at the tip of the tongue. By keeping a close watch over our words, we soon acquire the habit of uttering only words which are helpful to others. The seeker trained in this art soon acquires a tremendous power to influence others. His words compel the attention of others.

iii) One who does not waste his words always *encourages others*, he never condemns or criticises. He is quick to see good qualities in others, and draws out the best in them. He never bothers about their faults and weaknesses.

These are enormous spiritual gains in life for a spiritual seeker.

Step 31: **औदासीन्यमभीप्स्यतां** ***Audaaseenyam abheepsyataam***

Be indifferent.

Now we come to the most difficult of all areas regarding Titiksha – the mental level, the fortress of the Ego. Mental torments are very hard to handle unless one is spiritually advanced and lives above the "*Ego-line*". That is where all of us are bound for one day!

Organisational Planning

Whenever we wish to do something, the planning for it begins in the mind and the director of the plan is the Ego. It is a very sensitive function. Any opposition to one's plan is usually seen as a threat by the Ego, and is rejected very strongly by it. This is a major factor that determines how people group together on their own. They "gell" together on the basis of common aims and purposes, so that minimal stress is placed on one's mind.

If organisations are not careful about these matters, there is bound to be enormous discontent among its members. The primary sources of mental torments – criticisms, harsh words, disrespect, etc. – come flooding in. This is a challenge faced by any organisation, including Ashrams.

The discussion of this step continues together with the next step:

Step 32: **जनकृपा नैष्ठुर्यमुत्सृज्यताम् ॥४॥** ***Janakripaa naishthuryam utsrijyataam***

Save yourself from the meshes of obligations to others.

Human relationships are very delicately poised, due to the chemistry involved in the intermingling of people. In the context of human relationships, this step risks being misapplied. More often, it is simply beyond the reach of most people. Here, the context is the life of an *advanced seeker*. The principle involved is a two-way agreement:

> ***"We should not let people around us become an obstacle to our progress, nor should we become an obstacle to their progress."***

Handling Sattwa with Caution

"Meshes of obligations" needs to be clarified. When a good deed is done, the receiving party is placed under an unsaid obligation. Such obligations can multiply and add to the web of entanglement in the world. To a spiritual aspirant, this is not a thing to be encouraged. But its discouragement requires great tact and care.

1. ***Receiving the Kindness of Others***: To the man of God, people are bound to be very kind, adoring, reverent and ready to be of any service. They are, as it were, at his beck and call. How does he prevent them ruling, or perhaps, *ruining* his life by their kindness? Sri Shankaracharyaji is most qualified to advise us on this, having travelled all over India on his mission to spread Advaita, and having encountered thousands of such "kindnesses".

Sri Gurudev Sivananda had his own unique way. He treated himself with SB/40 – "Shoe-Beating 40 times" . After being garlanded in public, he would go to his room and beat himself 40 times with his shoes!

2. ***Being Kind to Others***: Nor should others become obligated to him. The man of God, impelled by his rare, magnetic, Sattwic qualities, could become deeply sympathetic to others and take their burdens upon his shoulders. Some impersonal element needs to be maintained. This means that when he does help others, he should feel that it is God who is really helping them through him. Then he frees people from being obligated to him.

3. ***Being a Guide to Others***: A third way of getting entangled is by taking on the role of a Guru when it is unsanctioned or unsolicited. The problem is worsened when, due to over-enthusiasm of wanting to see change in others, aggressive means are used to 'blast' the weaknesses out of them – to supposedly *speed up* their transformation!

Possible Solutions to Relationships

1. One way is to ensure compatibility among co-workers. Teams are built up so that there is a spirit of harmony among all members within a team.

2. Another way is to have frequent informal gatherings to relieve tensions among people. Sports and other special (not social) occasions are useful in achieving this purpose.

3. The ultimate solution for all mental challenges is *selflessness*. Sri Hanuman is an ideal who exemplified this quality. He was totally devoted to Sri Rama. Nothing disturbed his mental equilibrium. He always felt that with the strength of his Lord behind every thought, word and deed, no one had the power to deflect him from his course of action, not even powerful tyrants like Ravana. Having not a tinge of selfishness, Hanuman had the purity that protected him from all mental torment. *He did not need to take recourse to indifference.*

CONCLUSION:

Nobody on this planet is free from having critics. Even Sri Rama and Sri Krishna had their share of critics; Jesus and Prophet Mohammed also had theirs.

For most of us, a *stoical attitude* is the only recourse. This means facing the adversity boldly without taking things personally, remaining inwardly *impersonal*, *indifferent* and *untouched*. "Be indifferent" is best described as developing an "***impersonal personality***".

Such is the personality required to enter the next phase of Sadhana – the "Highest Flight", which we shall cover in the three remaining talks.

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Verse 5: CULMINATION OF SPIRITUAL LIFE (Steps 33-40)

SAVIKALPA SAMADHI: Steps 33-34

PENULTIMATE STEPS TO REALISATION

MANANA & NIDIDHYASANA were the last Sadhanas dealt with, in Verse 3, before we had Verse 4 as an interval. We resume Sadhana now with Verse 5 on the "Highest Flight" in spiritual life that takes us into the realm of spiritual illumination or God-realisation.

We shall deal with the 8 steps of this verse in three talks: i) Today's covers the first two steps on **Savikalpa Samadhi**; ii) then we take up the next two steps on **Nirvikalpa Samadhi**; and finally, iii) we shall take the last four steps on **Liberation of the Jiva** or what it means to be spiritually awakened in relation to this world.

We begin this final verse of Sadhana with some key remarks on two characteristics of Hinduism: 1. its openess to the intellect; and 2. its concept of God-realisation.

In any other religion, these remarks may sound very impertinent, perhaps even blasphemous but not in Hinduism. Hinduism, being the oldest religion known to man, is entitled to call itself the mother of all religions. It is founded on the direct experience of God by a long, endless line of spiritual Masters from time immemorial to this day. That makes Hinduism a rather unique universal religion.

1. Hinduism's Openness to the Intellect

Hindu scriptures have outlined the path to the Ultimate Goal in a systematic manner that is universal in application. Hindu scriptures abound in logic and well-reasoned arguments, affirming that spiritual attainment does not contradict the reason of man although it is beyond reason. So our effort tonight is not a vain or an absurd attempt, but a valid, accepted step in our quest for Truth.

Hinduism has never insulated itself from sincere intellectual scrutiny. It welcomes intellectual curiosity. It is not blasphemous in Hinduism to *THINK* and explore oneself. Our scriptures encourage students to have an intellectual understanding upon which to base their faith. Hinduism is a religion free from dogma or rigid statements like having only one path, one religion, one prophet, one holy book, one ideology, etc. The only thing that is only one in Hinduism is the Supreme Reality, and that, too, in a universal context.

In the West it is unthinkable for anyone to dare to challenge the established religion. Those who have tried to do that have been persecuted. This is not so in Hinduism. This freedom in the religion is due to its enormous depth and its anchorage in Truth. It knows that Truth always triumphs, so it does not fear being challenged or threatened.

Brahman Himself, so to say, presides over the Hindu religion. Hinduism has never been a politicised religion. It is free from the control of any temporal authority or state government, unlike Christianity and Islam at different periods in their history and even today. Hindu literature has never been tampered with by political interests. Hindu scriptures remain pristinely pure due, to some extent, to being written in Samskrit.

2. What is "God-Realisation" in Hinduism?

Especially relevant to today's topic is what we mean by God-Realisation. Realisation in Hinduism is nothing short of becoming *identical* with God! Saints and sages have urged further that this realisation is our Birthright, and none can deprive us of it. It is seen as a scientific quest possible for anyone who is willing to pay the price for it. It is not something dependent on anything or anyone external. The attainment of God is based on spiritual Laws that govern spiritual matters, just as physical laws govern the physical world.

Illumination is guaranteed to those who obey the spiritual laws; it is not a hit-and-miss affair; it is not a game of chance. The supreme parameter for God-realisation is an intense yearning or Bhakti to know the Truth at all costs, at any sacrifice, in the face of any persecution. Realisation of God is a certainty – the final destination of the spiritual Path.

Hindus accept Jesus's declaration of his identity with his Father in the light of this definition of realisation. The powerful people of his own time considered it to be treason and he was crucified. In India Jesus is honoured as a realised Rishi!

Like any goal, realisation is attained in stages through systematic practice. To show that is the purpose of these talks. The stage we describe today is **Savikalpa Samadhi**.

Savikalpa Samadhi: Prelude to Realisation

1. *Its Definition*: Savikalpa Samadhi is a state when one has intermittent or momentary glimpses of the Supreme Truth. When this state is firmly established and not momentary any more, it is called **Nirvikalpa Samadhi,** which we will discuss next week.

2. *From Effort to Effortlessness*: In Savikalpa Samadhi, effort or Sadhana is needed to attain the state and to stay in it. Effort is needed in order to reach the 'effortless' state of God-realisation. Savikalpa Samadhi is the last stage when Sadhana is needed. Thereafter, in Nirvikalpa Samadhi there is an effortless abidance in God, and the state is irreversible when attained. A river that merges with the ocean can never again be a river.

3. *Level of Purity*: From the very beginning of spiritual life one's purity has been increasing continually. The difference between the different stages of Sadhana is one of Purity. Sadhana terminates when *Total Purity* is reached.

If purity were a measurable quality, at the beginning of each of the following stages the measurement would be something like this table (some people may prefer the degrees shown rather than the percentages):

SRAVANAM	**50%**	**(Matric)**
MANANAM	**60%**	**(Bachelor)**
NIDIDHYASANAM	**70%**	**(Master)**
SAVIKALPA SAMADHI	**95%**	**(Doctorate)**
NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI	**100%**	**(Professor)**

In other words, in Savikalpa Samadhi, we are dealing with someone who is already highly developed with 95% purity. One might put it this way: He is *near-perfect*; he needs only to "polish" himself a little. Most of the work is done, but the final touches are needed. This "polishing" from 95-100% is what we are dealing with on reaching Savikalpa Samadhi.

Step 33: एकान्ते सुखमास्यतां ***Ekaante sukhamaasyataam***

In solitude live joyously.

Ekaante: *"being alone (eka), at one end (ante)".* It translates practically as **Solitude** in one's *external environment* . This can be very helpful for one's spiritual practice. In solitude, one should live with joy or contentment in one's heart.

As with most Sadhanas, there are positives and negatives. We shall first look at the positives and with the next step we shall see the negatives.

Advantages of Solitude

If all the Sadhana up to now has been done well, Solitude will find its natural place in our life at this stage. When we are ready for it, God will arrange for us to go into Solitude.

Being "at one end" implies not being at the centre. It is the preferred, quieter place to be. Crowds gather at the centre; there is a clamour for the limelight at centre-stage, and that is something the spiritual seeker does not need. People are fewer at the outskirts. Retreats are always arranged away from the hustle and bustle of cities.

When the mind is totally free of outer attachments, and therefore capable of being fully focused inwardly, one finds – or rather, God finds for us – a place of solitude to pursue further Sadhana without distraction. When God finds us a place of solitude, without us having to go out of our way to arrange it, then we can also take it as His approval that we are ready for solitude. Let us go to the next step before explaining this.

Step 34: परतरे चेतः समाधीयतां ***Paratare chetah samaadheeyataam***

Quieten your mind in the Supreme Lord.

This step is the counterpart of the above step. It deals with the *internal environment* needed for Savikalpa Samadhi Sadhana. In practice, this means a **quiet mind**; a well-controlled mind, one that is obedient to a higher power seated within the heart, whom we call the Supreme Lord. This condition is more essential than the external one of Solitude. If you have both, you have a bargain.

Even in the midst of a busy city, one could be in 'Solitude' if one keeps focussed on his own Sadhana, and does not allow his mind to run outside. The *rarified atmosphere* of one's mind is sufficient solitude. There is no more need to rely on an external solitude.

Disadvantages of Premature Solitude

Now we are ready to look into the negatives of solitude.

If we go into solitude prematurely, we will not live it "joyously". The silence would be quite deafening, perhaps even 'deadly'! The mind will rebel and run riot among the objects of desire. To the unprepared, Swami Chinmayanandaji used to say, "Don't rush off to the peaks to meditate; meditation itself will take you to the peaks!"

If we cannot take naturally to solitude, it is a sign that we still need to interact with others. The world still has something to teach us, to point out some of our flaws. The world is the best chisel to shapen us up. It chisels out the sharp edges of our personality.

Combination of Internal and Extarnal Help

Quietness of mind is an internal factor; solitude is its external counterpart. The two support and complement each other. Each one has its own contribution to make in taking us forward towards the Goal. Both are necessary. The internal factor is more essential. The quiet life in solitude helps to *deepen* the quietness of our mind; at the same time the quietness in our mind makes us *capable* of living in solitude, that is, the quietness in the mind makes solitude itself possible.

Thus we see that Steps 33 and 34 are actually a couple that functions together.

Paratare: *"higher than the high";* i.e. higher than Maya. As the meditation deepens and the meditator spends longer and longer periods in absolute silence of the mind, he rises above or transcends the power of Maya which draws him down or attaches him to the "lower". This is the essence of the practice in Savikalpa Samadhi.

Nididhyasana, Savikalpa Samadhi & Nirvikalpa Samadhi Linked

Finally, let us summarise the difference between the top-level steps of Sadhana.

> ***When all traces of Viparita Bhavana are removed, the seeker comes to the end of Nididhyasana and the dawn of Savikalpa Samadhi; effort is still needed to remain in Samadhi.***
>
> ***When remaining in Samadhi becomes effortless, he comes to the end of Savikalpa Samadhi and enjoys the dawn of Nirvikalpa Samadhi.***

The Guru After Realisation

What happens to the Guru-disciple relationship after one has achieved the goal? The Indian view on this important matter is quite clear:

> ***i) Before liberation, Guru Bhakti arises due to thirst for knowledge.***
> ***ii) After liberation, Guru Bhakti flourishes due to gratitude.***

God sends the Guru, and when his job is done, He takes him away also. When the candle is lit, we do not go on holding the matchstick to it. However, the Indian tradition holds aloft the sanctity of the relationship with one's Guru – even more *after* the disciple attains the goal. The tradition is that the disciple lays all his attainment at the feet of his Guru. It is the Guru's mission that he seeks to fulfil till the end of his life.

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NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI: Steps 35-36

MERGING WITH GOD

AN AUSPICIOUS DAY dawns when the processes of Sravana, Manana, Nididhyasana and Savikalpa Samadhi come to their culmination in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. The thick fog of doubt and delusion that surrounds the Self lifts up, and the aspirant beholds the rarest of all visions – he sees himself to be one with the luminous Sun of Supreme Consciousness. This is the crest-jewel among all human experiences. We reach the long-cherished Goal of all spiritual endeavour. Beloved Friends, **God-Experience** is our topic tonight.

The man of realisation stands as an Emperor before all the forces of Nature which once danced all around him. He is now Master of those forces that are the genesis of Creation. All its question marks have been dissolved. The pinnacle of perfection of this human birth is the experience of the unity of the Self. The ultimate Goal has become a certainty, as real as as clutching a fruit in the palm of one's hand.

The Hard-Earned Fruit of Sadhana:

The great journey during which we had to struggle through every inch of the way, ends with the effortless discovery that our real Self is none other than the Universal Self. It took 34 hard-earned Steps to arrive at this state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Everything prior to this state had to be gained by the "sweat of one's brow". Now, the realized sage sees with an effortless ease who he really is.

Explaining effortlessness, Acharyaji said: "Doing the right thing requires no effort now; making a mistake is what requires some thinking!" A student learning a musical instrument toils day and night. He makes mistakes easily; to press the *right* keys requires great effort. But once he masters the instrument, the correct keys are pressed effortlessly to bring out the desired tune; to press the *wrong* keys requires a conscious effort!

An example from ordinary life: When we are deeply absorbed in an activity with single-minded concentration, when our mind is fully engrossed, we lose all track of time, all concern for food, all inclination to indulge. Nothing matters to us except the activity at hand. We say, "I was one with my work; I enjoyed every moment of it."

This gives us some idea of what a saint's life is like. Maya could once dangle him like a puppet, as a child plays with its toy. She held all the power to rule his life. Now that same Maya is powerless and charmless to delude and disturb his peace. The saint has conquered Maya in Her own realm, i.e. while still living, and risen above Her charms.

Step 35: पूर्णात्मा सुसमीक्ष्यतां *Poorna aatmaa susameekshyataam*
Realise and see the all-pervading Self everywhere.

To get some idea of this Step we need to turn to the accounts of it given by the rare fraternity of saints among mankind. They have crossed the Rubicon – for them there is no turning back to endure the illusions of worldly existence. They are ever our true guides.

How to Understand "All-Pervading Self"?

Poorna-Atma: This word refers to the state which transcends all these limitations. What are these limitations which every human being is subject to? They are two of them:

i) ***Desha***, or *spatial* limitation; this leads to ***Vastu***, or *object* limitation;
iii) ***Kala***, or *time* limitation; this leads to ***Anubhava***, or an *experience* limitation.

In ordinary life, it is normal to have these limitations in all our experiences. We are locked in phenomenal existence. Time and Space affect every experience we have. Objects appear separate due to the intervention of Space. Experiences fluctuate due to the intervention of Time. It cannot be otherwise.

To understand how a saint experiences this world, we have to use our imagination a little. This is not to suggest that imagination will grant us the same vision; God-vision is not so cheaply obtained. However, let us imagine, for the sake of satisfying this curious intellect!

Firstly, imagine all the free **Space** between all the objects in this world being sucked away by a powerful vacuum cleaner, a "Super-Vacuum Cleaner" . The result would be that everything gets closely packed together. In fact, such a suction of all intervening space would remove all separation and bring all objects together as one, single **Object**. Everything would become one.

Secondly, we use our imagination to remove all **Time** that separates one experience from the next. We use the "Super-Vacuum Cleaner" to suck up all the blank time moments between experiences. What are we left with? Just one, single **Experience**. Every experience would merge together and become one.

Now, keeping this imagined situation alive in our intellects, let us turn to Arjuna's Cosmic Vision in the Bhagavad Geeta. This is exactly what the Lord does. He shows Arjuna the whole universe compressed into the human dimensions of His own material body. And then He compresses the whole time-line from negative infinity to positive infinity into the present moment called Now. He shows Arjuna the past and the future. In fact, Arjuna is shown the result of the battle which he is still to engage in!

> ***It is by such an amazing shift in our consciousness that the Lord tries to deliver the infinite Truth to our intellect!***

For the sage who forever dwells in his own Self, even a thought is considered to be too 'gross' in comparison to abiding in the Self. Thoughts appear to him as a limitation that is as solid as an external object. Thus there is no distinction for the sage such as physical or mental limitation; in relation to the Self, every limitation is "physical".

All Previous Steps Recognised With Gratitude

Su-Sameekshyataam: Sage Shankaracharya uses the double prefix here. To translate it as "*Realise and see*" does not do it justice. The prefixes *Su* and *Sam,* are very significant. They contain an appreciation of all the great effort that was taken in the 34 previous Steps, which made this Step of Self-realisation possible.

The word pays tribute to all the prior stages in which the hard work was done to make Samadhi possible. What an unusual expression of gratitude – the very processes of Sadhana are given pride of place in the accomplishment! Such is the attitude ingrained in the Indian tradition of Vedanta. From every breath of Vedanta oozes out the precious

feeling of gratitude. Gratitude is the string that runs through all the steps of Sadhana, and binds them into a beautiful garland worthy of being offered to the Divine!

Step 36: **जगदिदं तद्बाधितं दृश्यताम् ।** ***Jagad idam tad baadhitam drishyataam***

Recognise that the finite universe is a projection of the Self.

The previous step was nothing short of the "Supra-mundane Cosmic Vision." This step describes its terrestrial counterpart.

The Vision of God

Acharyaji explained this vision to ordinary minds like ours in these words: "A goldsmith sees the jewellery, but he sees the gold *more clearly*; a potter sees the pot, but he sees the clay *more clearly*; so also, one who has entered Samadhi still sees the world, but he sees the Self *more clearly* – for the whole universe is only a *projection of the Self*."

This may even be thought of as a "shift in identity".

When we see a mirage, it is our knowledge of geography that tells us that it is not water. Knowledge has the power to rectify a false perception. In the same way, where previously the world appeared real, now with knowledge it is clearly seen as a projection of the Self. The world is still the same, but now it is seen differently.

The practical aspect of the new vision is that there is now no room for the ego to have any influence on us anymore. There is no longer an ego-sense left in the usual sense of the word. One sees all beings as himself only. There is no sense of possessiveness,; no arrogance, wanting or having. The personality has been completely overhauled of its narrow self-centred outlook, and a refreshing broader outlook has taken its place.

Manmohan's Car . . . Ownership at Last!

We continue, as promised in Step 21, with the story of Manmohan and his Car:

You will recall that Manmohan is faced with the problem of paying his instalments for the Car of his dreams – the Cosmic Vision. He works hard and every now and then he pays an instalment towards the Car. Each instalment represents a glimpse of the goal or ***Savikalpa Samadhi***. Manmohan is getting closer and closer to his goal with each payment.

After many years of hard work, Manmohan finally manages to pay off his last instalment. He now signs and seals the deal. Manmohan is about to acquire the Car he dreamt of! Having sealed the deal, it will not be long before he takes ownership. Major changes start taking place in his life. This is what now happens in quick succession:

i) The signing represents *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*.

i) All *Viparita Bhavana* is cleared by paying off the final instalment. The account has been settled. It means 100% Chitta Shuddhi. No trace of any lurking desires remain in him.

ii) All the *Karmas* from time immemorial are annulled in one instant. No debts remain to be paid. With that 100% Chitta Ekagrata is achieved. There is focus of mind.

iii) The *Jiva Bhavana*, the "I-thought" which is the very root or cause of the accumulation of all Paapa and Punya (i.e. all Karma), is completely uprooted so that no further Karma can ever arise again. That brings an end to the entire Samsaric life.

There is now no obstruction left to acquiring the car. Everything has been paid for. It only remains for the delivery man to do his job and deliver the car to Manmohan.

The Delivery Man is the ***Mahavakya***, "*Tat Twam Asi*", which now delivers the vehicle of Atma-Jnana to Manmohan, the seeker. The car is actually delivered at the very door of Manmohan's cottage, and driven into his garage. What a sight it makes – to see a sparkling beauty actually parked in the garage! It is so different from seeing it in the showroom.

Then the keys are handed over to Manmohan. The scriptures say realisation is as real as "having an ***amalaka*** fruit in the palm of one's hand". Manmohan can actually feel the bunch of *keys* in his hand! The car is in *his* control at last, and he can now go wherever he wants to with it.

What was previously only *indirect knowledge* or **Paroksha Jnana** of the car in the showroom, now becomes *direct Knowledge* or **Aparoksha Jnana** when the Mahavakya actually delivers the Jnana of Self-knowledge directly to him through the experience of his identity with the Supreme Brahman in Nirvikalpa Samadhi.

Conclusion

It is helpful to know that the Knowledge actually comes during the stage of Sravana. Nirvikalpa Samadhi is the complete stabilization and assimilation of that very same theoretical knowledge.

What remains to be explained is the subject of bondage and liberation relating to our Karma. This is covered in the last four Steps. We shall take it up in the final talk of this series next week.

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JIVANMUKTI: Steps 37-40

LIBERATION FROM THE LIFE CYCLE

WE BEGIN THIS FINAL talk by briefly summarising what Self-realisation means to us. The magnitude of such an achievement may not have yet pierced the skin of our intellect:

Modern writers (of the West and East) have given numerous names to the inner processes described below. In order not to complicate what is being meant, we have stuck with the *Vedic terminology*, since it retains the proper connotations to it.

Summary of the Steps to God-Realisation:

We have come to a point where the spiritual growth has come to its culmination in Samadhi. We briefly re-cap the route we have travelled so far:

1. The knowledge that we received during *Sravanam* destroyed ***Abhavana***, or the "non-apprehension" of the Truth.

2. Then we undertook *Mananam* in which we carefully reflected upon and cleared all our doubts regarding the Truth. The firm conviction that resulted drove away ***Asambhavana*** or the "mis-apprehension" of the world.

3. Then came *Nididhyasana* in which we overcame our habitual ways of behaving, namely the ***Viparita Bhavana***. This was done through the process of deep meditation, using the "*I am Brahman*" thought called the ***Brahmakara Vritti*** (Step 21) and strengthening it continually by more and more concentrated effort.

4. Then came *Savikalpa Samadhi* where one had to make an immense effort to hold on to the "*I am Brahman*" thought. This stage took us from the subtle or mental level into the Causal level of Vasanas. The "*I am Brahman*" thought became the positive Vasana that overthrew all the negative Vasanas that hung on the thought "*I am the body*".

5. Finally we came to *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* when even the liberating Brahmakara Vritti was discarded after having done its job of removing all the unwanted Vasanas. This state was characterised by effortlessness. With it came the experience of ***Param Ananda***, or Supreme Bliss.

The World of Transmigration

The realm of transmigration is Samsara, and so long as there exist the Samsaric or world-attaching Karmas, we shall remain firmly tied to this world of physical experiences. To ordinary people life is an endless interplay of actions and their reactions.

What about the rare few who have realised God? It is interesting to note what happens to their Karmic account. The scriptures reveal that the stock of past Karma (Sanchita) is completely wiped off when a person realizes God. It is treated as a "bad debt", as it were! This manner of settling all the unaccounted Karmas of the past may baffle us. How can a person be allowed to go "scot-free" like that? Surely there is something 'unfair' about this debt being simply written off?

The discussion that follows applies only to the liberated sage, the one who is established in Nirvikalpa Samadhi. That is the theme in the final four steps, 37-40.

Step 37: प्राक्कर्म प्रविलाप्यतां *Praakkarma pravilaapyataam*

The effects of all Sanchita Karma (the full past storehouse) is erased.

Sanchita Karma Wiped Off

When the person attains the God-realised state, he becomes "dead" to worldly affairs. He no longer has the body and mind identity. He has risen to the absolute realm, from which standpoint Karmas do not even exist. So to whom does the Clerk in God's Office send the Karma bill? The person cannot be contacted. The Clerk just has to 'close his file'!

Here is an example of this from our ordinary experience. Take a person's debts in this world. He may have large amounts to pay off, but when he dies, his files have simply got to be closed up. There is no such person anymore.

Thus all the Sanchita Karmas become annulled at the moment of realisation. It is said the fire of knowledge burns away all those Karmas, however big the bundle may have been.

The next question to arise is, "What about his future Karmas?" The answer given is…

Step 38: चितिबलान्नाप्युत्तरैः श्लिष्यतां *Chitibalaan na api uttaraih shlishyataam*

Through wisdom he cuts off from all Agami Karma (future actions).

Agami Karma Cannot Arise

In ordinary existence, the actions we do now, get added to the bundle of Karmas which we have to pay off in our future. However, in the case of the saint who has realized his oneness with Brahman, whatever actions he does during the remainder of his life after realization, can bear no Karma in the future. How is that possible? That also seems to violate our basic sense of justice and fair play.

The explanation for this is quite logical. Karmas are incurred by one who considers himself as their "*Doer*". The saint has no trace of 'doer-ship'. He holds the feeling that God alone is the doer of everything. His actions therefore cannot create any Karma. As there is no ego-sense in him, his actions cannot leave any trace of Karma.

The "wisdom" referred to in this step is the wisdom of living and acting without any "doer-ship", without any ego-sense. All actions are offered to the Divine; they are totally selfless; they have no power to bind the actor. That renders the man of realization exempt from incurring any further Karmas. Such a soul is freed from all past and future Karmas.

Chitti Balam means "*the strength of one's pure mind*." These words appear significantly in the middle of the sentence, between the past Karmas and the future Karmas, and can therefore be taken to apply to both. Even as a light placed at the doorway between two rooms will light up both rooms, in the same way Chitti Balam applies equally to both the past and the future Karmas.

Step 39: प्रारब्धं त्विह भुज्यतां *Praarabdham tviha bhujyataam*

Experience and exhaust the Prarabdha, fruits allotted for this birth.

Prarabdha Karma Has to be Worked Out

However, there is one category of Karma which even the realized soul has to go through till it is exhausted through fructification. That is his Prarabdha Karma.

Prarabdha Karma is defined as that portion of the total (Sanchita) Karma which is responsible for or allotted to one's present birth. It is like an arrow that has already been released – it has to hit the target, it cannot be withdrawn in mid-air. Thus, the bundle of Prarabdha has to be experienced in full, whether painful or pleasurable. There is no exemption from it, even in the case of saints. However, there is an important difference.

The way saints experience Prarabdha is different from the way we experience it. Saints are free of body-consciousness, and so they are indifferent to what Prarabdha brings to them. It is as good as there being no Prarabdha.

A More Philosophical Explanation

For those who desire a deeper philosophic insight into the way a sage sees the world, Acharyaji obliged with the following unusual explanation:

1. **No Duality**: A new term is now being introduced – **Akhandata**. It means "*no dichotomy between subject and object*". In ordinary perception, there has to be a subject and an object. In God-realisation, the sage has the Akhandata vision. He sees an unbroken mass of Reality. There is no two (subject and object); there is only the One Reality.

2. **No Ego**: In normal experience, the ego is the subject, and the world is the object. In God-vision this is not the case. Oneness cannot co-exist with the ego. In the state of Oneness, the ego gets dissolved completely and one experiences Oneness with the whole world. Subject and object become unified.

3. **No Karma**: The implication is that at one shot, the Sanchita Karma is totally annulled. Let us take the example of a dream experience. Suppose one has this fantastic dream: He is a tycoon, not an ordinary tycoon but a super-tycoon, the sort that one can only be in a dream! Real tycoons are known to buy out islands; but the dream-tycoon is presently dreaming of buying off the whole continent! At that point he suddenly awakens from his dream. However promising the dream was, does it not all simply vanish into nothingness? It is the same with the Sanchita Karma of a realized saint.

4. **No Caue & Effect**: The very nature of the experience of existence suddenly changes – it has no semblance to ordinary existence as we know it, which has to follow the cause-effect rule. From a worldly standpoint, It is impossible to have any non-causal situation; to us, anything has to have a cause. We cannot comprehend the Absolute plane which is a "Karma-free Zone". There are no Karmas in the Absolute plane!

5. **No "Death"**: In normal experience, when Prarabdha Karma is exhausted, the body has done its work and, without exception, it has to fall off. The 'pot' space merges with the universal space. But in the case of the sage, there is no separate space in the first place. So death itself has no significance to him; he is already 'dead' to the world from the moment he had realised. Hence, in his case, the term *death* is not used. Instead, he is said to have attained **Videhamukti**, or "liberation from the body".

Step 40: अथ परब्रह्मात्मना स्थीयताम् ॥५॥ ***Atha parabrahma aatmanaa stheeyataam***

Thereafter, live absorbed in the Bhava, "*I am Brahman*".

The Exalted State of God-Realisation

The life of God-realisation has no description among mortals. Some glimpses of it have been given above from the words of saints. It is the pinnacle of perfection for man.

People have come to ask Acharyaji, "How life is after God-realisation?" The answer to this question can only be very cryptic: "*You* will not be there to know!"

The meaning is simple. There is no more "I". The "I" has kicked the bucket at the moment of realization.

"*I am Brahman*" stands here for complete identification with the Supreme Source of our existence. It is the very opposite of "*I am the Body*", which stands solely for the material aspect of existence.

The realized person passes through his Prarabdha Karma with complete balance, unaffected by joys and sorrows that are brought on by Prarabdha. He simply witnesses them passing through him.

The body that made this experience possible is thanked profusely. But for its co-operation, the journey would not have been possible. The body is now truly experienced as the sacred temple of God. In Indian tradition a saint's body is considered holy and is preserved by being interred and duly worshipped, as was the body of Swami Sivananda and many other exceptional saints.

CONCLUSION to the Entire Talks

Befittingly, we end with the name of 'Sivananda'on our lips. We have just recounted the Videhamukti of the great sage of Rishikesh. These talks have been held beside the sacred spot where his earthly body has been interred, his sacred Samadhi Shrine. It has been our privilege to sit here and ponder over the subject that was so dear to his heart, namely, Sadhana. Indeed, the Worshipful Master's prime contribution to the world was to inspire human souls to practice Sadhana, whatever their stage of evolution was.

To our great Master, in the abode of his holy presence, we conclude the subject that began more than six months ago. May He be pleased with our Sadhana! May He bless us all to go on making our humble effort to transform our every thought, word and deed into a Sadhana worthy of offering at His Lotus Feet!

Om Tat Sat!

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SADHANA PANCHAKAM

Split-Sandhee Samskrit Format

(The 40 Steps are Numbered)

1. वेद्–**ओ** नित्यम् अधीयतां,
2. तद् उदितं कर्म स्वनुश्ठीयतां;
3. तेने शस्य विधीयताम् अपचितिः,
4. काम्ये मति–**स्** त्यज्यताम् ।

5. पापौघः परिधूयतां,
6. भवसुखे, दोष्–**ओ** ऽनुसन्धीयतां;
7. आत्म्–**ए**–च्छा व्यवसीयतां,
8. निजगृहात् तूर्णं विनि–**र्** गम्यताम् ॥१॥

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9. संगः सत्सु विधीयतां,
10. भगवत्–**ओ** भक्ति–**र्**–दढ्–**आ**–धीयतां;
11. शान्त्–**य्** आदिः परिचीयतां,
12. दृढतरं कर्माशु संत्यज्यताम् ।

13. सद् विद्वान् उपसृप्यतां,
14. प्रतिदिनं तत् पादुका सेव्यतां;
15. ब्रह्म्–**ऐ**–क्–**आ**–क्षरम् अर्थ्यतां,
16. श्रुति–शिर्–**ओ** वाक्यं समाकर्ण्यताम् ॥२॥

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17. वाक्यार्थ–**श** च विचार्यतां श्रुति शिरः,
18. पक्षः समाश्रीयतां;
19. दु–**स्** तर्कात् सुविरम्यतां,
20. श्रुति मत–**स्** तर्क्–**ओ** ऽनुसंधीयताम् ।

21. ब्रह्म्–**आ**–स्म्–**ई**–ति विभाव्यताम् अह–**र्** अह–**र्**,
22. गर्वः परित्यज्यतां;
23. देह्–**ए** ऽहं मतिरुझ्यतां,
24. बुध जनै–**र्** वादः परित्यज्यताम् ॥३॥

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25. क्षुद् व्याधि–**श्** च चिकित्स्यतां,
26. प्रतिदिनं भिक्ष्–**औ**–षधं भुज्यतां;
27. स्वाद्–**व्** अन्नम् न तु याच्यतां,
28. विधि वशात् प्राप्तेन संतुष्यताम् ।

29. शीत्–**ओ**–ष्णादि विषह्यतां,
30. न तु वृथा वाक्यं समुच्चार्यतां;
31. औदासीन्यम् अभीप्स्यतां,
32. जन कृपा नैष्ठुर्यम् उत्सृज्यताम् ॥४॥

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33. एकान्ते सुखम् आस्यतां,
34. परतरे चेतः समाधीयतां;
35. पूर्णात्मा सुसम् ईक्ष्यतां,
36. जगद् इदम् तद् बाधितं दृश्यताम् ।

37. प्राक् कर्म प्रविलाप्यतां,
38. चिति बलान् न्–**आ**–प्–**य्** उत्तरैः श्लिष्यतां;
39. प्रारब्धं त्विह भुज्यताम्,
40. अथ पर ब्रह्म्–**आ**–त्मना स्थीयताम् ॥५॥

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SADHANA PANCHAKAM

Split-Sandhee English Transliteration

(The 40 Steps are Numbered)

1. vēd-**ō** nityam adhīyatāṁ,
2. tad uditaṁ karma svanuśṭhīyatāṁ;
3. tēnē śasya vidhīyatām apacitiḥ,
4. kāmyē mati-**s** tyajyatām |

5. pāpaughaḥ paridhūyatāṁ,
6. bhavasukhē, dōṣ-**ō** :'nusandhīyatāṁ;
7. ātm-**ē**-cchā vyavasīyatāṁ,
8. nijagṛhāt tūrṇaṁ vini-**r** gamyatām ||1||

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9. saṁgaḥ satsu vidhīyatāṁ,
10. bhagavat-**ō** bhakti-**ra**-daḍh-**ā**-dhīyatāṁ;
11. śānt-**y** ādiḥ paricīyatāṁ,
12. dṛḍhataraṁ karmāśu saṁtyajyatām |

13. sad vidvān upasṛpyatāṁ,
14. pratidinaṁ tat pādukā sēvyatāṁ;
15. brahm-**ai**-k-**ā**-kṣaram arthyatāṁ,
16. śruti-śir-**ō** vākyaṁ samākarṇyatām ||2||

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17. vākyārtha-**śa** ca vicāryatāṁ śruti śiraḥ,
18. pakṣaḥ samāśrīyatāṁ;
19. du-**s** tarkāt suviramyatāṁ,
20. śruti mata-**s** tark-**ō** :'nusaṁdhīyatām |

21. brahm-**ā**-sm-**ī**-ti vibhāvyatām aha-**ra** aha-**r**,
22. garvaḥ parityajyatāṁ;
23. dēh-**ē** :'haṁ matirujhyatāṁ,
24. budha janai-**ra** vādaḥ parityajyatām ||3||

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25. kṣud vyādhi-**ś** ca cikitsyatāṁ,
26. pratidinaṁ bhikṣ-**au**-ṣadhaṁ bhujyatāṁ;
27. svād-**v** annam na tu yācyatāṁ,
28. vidhi vaśāt prāptēna saṁtuṣyatām |

29. śīt-**ō**-ṣṇādi viṣahyatāṁ,
30. na tu vr̥thā vākyaṁ samuccāryatāṁ;
31. audāsīnyam abhīpsyatāṁ,
32. jana kr̥pā naiṣṭhuryam utsr̥jyatām ||4||

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33. ēkāntē sukham āsyatāṁ,
34. paratarē cētaḥ samādhīyatāṁ;
35. pūrṇātmā susam īkṣyatāṁ,
36. jagad idam tad bādhitaṁ dr̥śyatām |

37. prāk karma pravilāpyatāṁ,
38. citi balān n-**ā**-p-**y** uttaraiḥ śliṣyatāṁ;
39. prārabdhaṁ tviha bhujyatām,
40. atha para brahm-**ā**-tmanā sthīyatām ||5||

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